

A Surgeon in California

gwb
S 91 S

by the same author

★

THE HEALING KNIFE
SURGEON'S SYMPHONY
A RING AT THE DOOR
THEY COME BY APPOINTMENT
THE WAY OF A SURGEON
A TALE OF TEN CITIES
STRANGE CASES
A DOCTOR'S ODYSSEY
PATIENTS' PROGRESS
A SURGEON REMEMBERS
SURGEON UNDER CAPRICORN
THE LURE OF SURGERY
A SURGEON AT LARGE
SURGERY AND CRIME
ALL THIS AND SURGERY TOO
THE EMPEROR STORY
SURGERY HOLDS THE DOOR
A SURGEON IN ROME

★

for the young

A BOY IN SAMARKAND
CAUGHT BY REVOLUTION
FLIGHT FROM THE PALACE

A Surgeon in California



by
GEORGE SAVA

FABER AND FABER
24 Russell Square
London

THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
ASTOR LENOX TILDEN FOUNDATION
455 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10018

THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
ASTOR LENOX TILDEN FOUNDATION
455 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10018

Contents



PROLOGUE	<i>page</i> 7
1. AN UNFORESEEN OBSTACLE	11
2. MY NEW FRIEND	20
3. TOM, DICK AND HARRY	30
4. SURGICAL ASSISTANT	41
5. DICK THE MASTER	52
6. HOME HAZARDS	61
7. TO HARRY'S AID	74
8. EN ROUTE TO ROME	85
9. AN OLD MAN'S STORY	98
10. DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY	108
11. THE MAN ON THE FLYING TRAPEZE	118
12. CHRISTMAS IN CALIFORNIA	129
13. SURGEONS ALL	141
14. STEER CLEAR OF RELATIVES	150
15. LOST WEEK-ENDS	160
16. THE BITTERNESS OF FAILURE	171
17. THE BOY FROM GUATEMALA	181
18. A TASTE OF HELL	192
19. THE ABRAHAM HARRY WASHINGTON JONES STORY	201
20. INGRATITUDE, BY ANY OTHER NAME!	212
21. 'DARBY AND JOAN'	225
EPILOGUE	238

To

WILLIAM AND CAROLE NOVICK

in memory of
a happy association and friendship

Prologue



As I sat back comfortably in the powerful Comet, I could still hear the farewell wishes of my Roman friends ringing in my ears. Every moment took me a little nearer my destination, London—a little further away from the life to which I had by then grown accustomed. Yet such was my lot; restless was my spirit, I was forever moving about, forever searching for something new.

Five years had elapsed; the '*passeggiata romana*' had expanded from a four months' trial period to five years of hard work and endless slogging. Admittedly, there had been welcome bonuses of reward and pleasure—but these had been unable to counteract the intense fatigue that had in the end taken me in its grip.

Little wonder, then, that weariness had made itself felt ever more strongly of late. My work in Rome had made ruthless demands on mind and body. So much so, that I felt quite listless and devoid of all energy.

'Arrivederci, Professore. Come back soon!' my friends had called in farewell. And I had answered:

'Yes, I will, I will!'

Two or three weeks in London, I reflected—two or three weeks of rest—and I would soon sort out all my plans for the immediate future.

'Of course I'll come back!' I told myself with conviction. 'Why not? Rome has been kind to me—I'll return to her after my brief holiday.'

Prologue

What an error on my part, to think that London would be the right place for a holiday! Almost instantly, it took possession of me. Once more I was entangled in work that knew no day's end or night's beginning. The routine had returned with a veritable avalanche!

Somehow, quite mysteriously, old patients and colleagues had detected my return. Was it telepathy or merely coincidence—who can tell? Whatever it was, the fact remains—I was at it again!

I might sit down to dinner with my family, believing, ever optimistically, that for the next hour at least I was at liberty to leave my chosen profession outside my personal surroundings. The shrill shout of the telephone would soon dispel all such presumptions only too forcefully.

I might try to get an early night and settle down in bed, greedily savouring the first words of a new novel—ah, what bliss, what incredible luxury!

'George, you're wanted on the phone!'

That telephone, sometimes I was ready to tear it asunder in sheer desperation! Never, never was I permitted to forget that I had chosen to be a doctor—never, whatever the hour, whatever the day. I had no respite, no public holidays, no private holidays—no peace.

There was only one thing for it—a holiday away from it all, as far away as possible and quite alone. That way, I might be able to relax for a time, to rest my overtaxed mind so that I might return with renewed strength and zest, for the benefit of all those dependent upon me, as much as for my own health.

More and more I found myself engrossed in thoughts of California: its glowing warmth, its luxuriance, its ensnaring beauty. Sentimental as I have always been, I missed it, as one might miss a woman one had been forced to abandon while she was in her most seductive prime. I now longed for this discarded love and all the renewed youth she could bestow upon me.

Prologue

In London the sober, down-to-earth side of me was by dint of necessity very much to the fore. In California the side of me I often had difficulty in suppressing—the sentimental, day-dreaming, frolicking side of me—could ‘have itself a ball’, to use an American expression.

Besides, I had many friends there—people who had asked me repeatedly to return, at least for a visit. Equally often, I had promised that one day I would.

What actually decided me in the last instance was dear old London herself. One of her dismal grey days, pouring with rain, designed as if deliberately to evoke a mood of gloom, as good as packed my bags for me then and there. Until then, I had only been toying fancifully with the idea of a short holiday in sunny California.

That morning, however, after an almost sleepless night, as I glanced into my shaving-mirror, I decided that the time for a brief rest was overdue. Soon, people in need of plastic surgery would flee in horror at the sight of the surgeon’s red-rimmed eyes with bags under them, and his sickly, pallid skin!

With disgust, I turned from my own image to the window overlooking my garden. ‘Here, even nature could do with a face-lift,’ I sighed on observing the bleak grey morning. The rain growled at me in almost articulate derision:

‘All right, Sava, have your holiday—I can well pour without you for a couple of weeks!’

‘I will, I will!’ I snorted back.

Over breakfast, I even spurned my daily paper; preferring the company of the suddenly vivid pictures dancing before my mind’s eye. Wide, spacious roads, golden sands, golden skins, golden hair—everything so steeped in up-to-date comforts; everything so alive and vital.

Yet if the days were sweet, the nights were even more glorious. Their soothing, fragrant coolness; their velvet, navy-blue skies dotted with millions of bright points of light.

Prologue

Now it all came back to me—there, over breakfast in a London suburb. Momentarily, I was all but driving down Sunset Boulevard—it had all become so real. A memory suppressed, like hunger or longing, will increase a thousand-fold, the longer it is thus stifled.

Impatient to be gone now, I made hurried arrangements for my trip. I was being very spartan with myself, for two weeks was all I intended to take for this holiday away from work and family.

Two weeks spent in the company of friends, in beautiful surroundings, in warmth and, above all, out of reach of my tormentor—the telephone! Two weeks enjoyed could be more beneficial than two months wasted in a colourless, ‘deck-chair on the pier’ holiday.

‘Who ever heard of anyone going on a two weeks’ holiday to California—two weeks?’ cried one of my colleagues in amazement, chewing frantically at a rather tough piece of steak. We were sitting in the doctors’ room of the hospital, snatching a hurried lunch. The windows were steamed up with humidity; the combined sounds of cutlery beating upon china, subdued conversation and furious rain against the glass created a strange, eerie symphony.

‘I can’t spare more time,’ I humoured my colleague.

‘I’m not a betting man, Sava, but I’ll make you a wager, you won’t be back in two weeks!’

I regarded him almost with suspicion for a moment. ‘What makes you so sure?’

‘Just that I’ve been to California too—and I know George Sava.’

‘Well, you’ll see, my friend!’ I replied equably.

I did have my holiday in California. Those two weeks, however, were to be the longest ones that I had ever experienced. It seemed that they were never to come to an end! Exactly what did happen to me during this ‘two weeks’ holiday’ will, I hope, fill this book.

An Unforeseen Obstacle



Throughout my life, no matter where or when, no matter what the circumstances, I have always been a man of extremes. It could, I suppose, be put down to my Slavonic origin or simply to the fact that, ever since I can remember, I have always had a distinct distaste, almost an aversion, for the nondescript—the grey, blurred objects in life. With me, things were either white or black every time. This made itself felt very strongly in my moods. Either I would be floating on air with bliss, or sinking far down into abysmal depths with gloom and despair.

I had long since abandoned the fight against this rather irksome trait in my character—for I knew it to be a battle already lost. All I could do was to bow to the inevitable and accept it with as good a grace as I could muster. This, then, was also the reason for my hesitation at all times to plan a holiday with any care or precision, as is the custom of most civilized people. I even grew wary of scheduling an itinerary, for fear that it would inevitably land me in the very opposite direction. I needed only to book a leisurely boat-trip to ensure my flight by the speediest jet-plane. Over and over again it had been so—and now the same phenomenon was to occur with my long yearned-for holiday!

An Unforeseen Obstacle

I was, of course, not a man entirely devoid of all reason or common sense. Bookings had to be made if one wished to travel in this modern age. So I had endeavoured once more to act like all other mortals and had stoically gone to make my bookings—though not without a twinge of foreboding.

The *Queen Mary*, it was, that I had singled out this time, to start me on my way. A lovely cabin was reserved there for George Sava. Was there a finer way of commencing a holiday than by four days of enforced idleness at sea? Ah, this was the way to begin a complete rest!

Monday, the eighteenth of September, was to be the date of my departure. With what ingenious strokes of the brush, with what deft fingers did I paint my mental pictures! That inviting, luxurious cabin; those sun-steeped decks waiting to be lazed on! I could actually feel the gentle caress of sea-breezes against my brow.

Family and friends could ill conceal their envy of me; nor their sadness at being unable to accompany me. My wife, however, consoled herself with the thought that two weeks would pass before my absence could assert itself too strongly. It wasn't as if I were going for a year or even two months—just fourteen short days!

'You know, George,' my wife told me on my last week-end at home, 'if I were you, I'd pack my suitcase now!' She added with a sigh: 'You're bound to forget something or other, if you leave it until the last moment on Monday. Then you'll come tearing back—giving me heart-failure—or you'll miss the boat altogether!'

'Mmm . . .' I mumbled, then: 'You're right, my dear,' I decided. 'I'll pack right now!'

As I warmed to the idea, I even suggested, 'I'll tell you what—just as soon as we've had lunch, we'll take the children and drive into the country!' The day was unusually bright and sunny and I wanted my poor, sun-starved family to make the most of it.

An Unforeseen Obstacle

Everyone hailed this suggestion with approval and I set off up the stairs to get my packing done. As a matter of course I selected the smallest suitcase—why should I be embarrassed by a load of luggage? What does a man like myself require for a mere two weeks, after all?

Tooth-brush—first and foremost! Oh, yes, my shaving kit! Nice as it would be not to have to use it—no, no, it had to make the journey! As for clothes, two suits should do—well, maybe an extra dark one for evenings. One must never overlook the possibility of some conference or other. (Holiday, or no—the doctor in me always contrived, somehow, to tip-toe into the scene!)

It was around two in the afternoon. Lunch just over, my packing under way, I thought we could set out for our family jaunt. Heavens, my passport—fancy forgetting that! How right my wife had been—I blessed her; it seemed I could never pack too early!

‘Jane!’ I now called to her. ‘Do you know where my passport is, have you seen it lately?’

‘No!’ she called back. ‘Have you tried your study? Maybe it’s in your desk!’

It took me over half an hour, but at length I did discover it. True, it had been in my study all the time, but so well had I stored it away—with such immense care—that it needed a veritable search-party to locate it. Still, I had unearthed it single-handed—and what a shock I received!

Ever since my first stay in America, I had scrupulously kept my re-entry permit up to date, seeing to it that it was renewed every two years. Now, two years is, of course, rather a long time for bearing in mind the exact date of permits and their expiry. It did not at that instant cross my mind that my poor permit might be on its last legs.

Yet out of curiosity, so irresistible is the sight of one’s passport, I opened it and idly scanned its pages; reliving a little of the past as I saw each different stamp—cheating

An Unforeseen Obstacle

myself somewhat, by adding even more romance and beauty to that faded time.

Just as I was smiling hazily to myself, recollecting little incidents here and there, my heart nearly missed a beat. There, on page twenty, a date stared at me in bold, black letters, decorated with the official stamp of the American Embassy:

‘September 16th, 1958—date of expiry of re-entry permit.’

I re-read that line, mumbled the date several times—for a moment it just would not register! Yet all too soon, I came out of my coma to exclaim, it appears none too quietly: ‘Good GOD!’

The explosion brought my wife rushing into the study.

‘What is it, George, are you all right?’ she enquired in a worried voice.

‘Well, I don’t really know—it—it appears that my permit for America expires on the 16th of this month!’

‘George, you’re being silly now—stop joking!’

‘Silly I may well be, my dear—but I’m hardly joking, I assure you!’ I now waved the passport in front of her, pointing to the offending stamp.

‘See for yourself—date of expiry—September 16th!’

Momentarily, Jane was stupefied, then said almost in anguish, ‘But, George, today is the 16th!’

‘Exactly!’ I replied triumphantly.

Brushing her forehead once or twice, she said more calmly: ‘Well, you just can’t go, then, your boat leaves on the 18th. Never mind, dear,’ she added philosophically. ‘It’ll have to be goodbye to California, for a while.’

‘Hm,’ I said rather bitterly. ‘It seems it’s not only goodbye to California, but to all my plans to boot—once again!’

My wife regarded me thoughtfully for a moment. ‘Can’t you get another visa?’ she suggested.

An Unforeseen Obstacle

'Yes. But that'll take at least two months. What with medicals, blood-tests, X-rays and all the other rigmarole—don't you remember?'

'Well?'

Now it was my turn to look thoughtful, and almost instantly I had the solution. 'Jane, I'll take the plane today!' I blurted out the words, surprising not only my wife, but myself as well—once my brain-wave had been voiced.

'What do you mean, today?'

'Today is the 16th—my permit does not expire till midnight!'

I consulted my watch—almost three o'clock. How I regretted the leisurely family lunch in which I had been persuaded to join; how much could I not have done in that valuable time! Nevertheless, I still had nine hours and jet-planes reached New York in six and a half hours flat!

'I could be in New York in six and a half hours, Jane!'

'True, but there is the journey to the airport to consider as well as the small matter of a reservation, isn't there?'

'That's right,' I agreed, quite undaunted.

For once, I almost felt inclined to bless Mr. Bell for his little monster-child! I proceeded to belabour the phone furiously. I did not spare a single air line but was made to realize, all too soon, that I was asking for the impossible. This, I was informed, was the height of the season for American tourists returning home.

At long last, a very sweet-voiced T.W.A. booking-clerk told me—by then it must have been for the twentieth time—that 'all is booked solidly, sir!' Yet this girl with the attractive voice had at least a suggestion to offer.

'Your only hope, sir, is to get to the airport immediately and wait there for a last-minute cancellation.' As a comforting after-thought, she assured me, 'This happens quite frequently, so do try it!' I, of course, promised to take her advice.

An Unforeseen Obstacle

The last plane for New York was due to take off at four-fifteen that afternoon. By the time I replaced the receiver it was past three-thirty.

My wife and children had been assembled around me all this time and had caught the gist of most of my frantic altercations. They knew, only too well, that reasoning with me at this stage would be futile. So they did the only other thing possible—they mustered their forces to convey both myself and luggage to the car, as quickly as they could.

Cursing traffic-lights, and ignoring the frequent, dismayed exclamations and warnings of the family at my erratic driving, I reached London Airport at last—at exactly five minutes past four. I came to a halt with a sigh of relief—at the wrong entrance! I was not unaware, either, of the children's barely hidden amusement at this final calamity. We had to drive two miles back to reach the T.W.A. reception desk. Yet at four-ten I was standing before the right desk, suitcase in hand and family a few paces behind.

The young man at the desk regarded me quizzically, in an almost awed fascination—so desperate must my voice have sounded. 'Umm . . . yes, I did have one **FIRST** class cancellation.' He was at great pains to give the rightful emphasis to 'first class'—'take it or leave it!' is what he probably would have liked to tell me.

He now consulted his watch—this clever young official needed few words to convey his meaning: 'You might just make it!'

I replied aloud, 'I'll take the ticket!'

Three minutes in which to hug the family, get my passport stamped and settle all other formalities. Just before I disappeared past the green lights, I waved once more to my still dazed wife and children.

As the ground-hostess caught sight of my ticket, she exclaimed: 'Heavens, you've missed that plane!' From where we stood, we could both clearly see the huge jet,

An Unforeseen Obstacle

whose steps were just being removed and whose doors were clanging to a close.

'I mustn't miss it—I just mustn't! Please, can't you possibly do something?'

'We'll try—follow me!'

We raced out. Two men, busy with the steps, looked at us and must have understood, for they replaced the steps instantly. The door of the plane swung half-open and I somehow managed to squeeze my none-too-sparse frame into the interior. Already we were taxi-ing for take-off. But I had made it—with thirty seconds to spare!

On the dot of four-fifteen the plane was airborne. Allowing six and a half hours for flight, I'd have one hour before the dead-line. 'Let's hope there won't be a delay—bad weather or something!' I prayed silently.

The journey itself, after that mad, topsy-turvy afternoon, was a genuine pleasure. No denying it—first-class passengers are certainly made to feel like kings.

Hardly had we left the ground than a constant flow of luxurious morsels was offered round. Hors d'oeuvre of various kinds; red and white wines; a sumptuous dinner and dessert; champagne and liqueurs. I had used up so much energy in the last two hours that I thoroughly savoured this gourmet's delight. It certainly was a compensation for the last frantic hours.

After coffee and brandy, I felt sufficiently sleepy to doze away the three remaining hours. Still only half-awake, I could just make out the Captain's announcements as to height and speed. Somehow, I managed even to fasten my seat-belt, though with the movements of a sleepwalker, no doubt.

As we circled Idlewild Airport, I regained full consciousness and glanced at my watch. Ten minutes past eleven—fifty whole minutes to spare! I could not refrain from giving myself a little secret pat on the back. I could only hope

An Unforeseen Obstacle

now that the immigration officer would not detain me unnecessarily. Midnight was my dead-line, after all!

Looking out of the window, I found it unnaturally bright for that time of night, almost as if the sun were shining. Wake up, Sava! Sunshine at midnight—impossible!

Yet it was possible, most certainly it was—all the more so, since it wasn't midnight at all. In my frenzied anxiety over the expiry of my permit, I had quite overlooked a most vital factor—the difference of five hours between London and New York time.

So I had had a crazy contest with Father Time himself—what an unnecessary scramble it had been! According to New York clocks, it had taken only two hours for us to travel from one continent to another. For I had left London at four-fifteen and it was now only six-fifteen. With as deep a sigh of relief as ever man could have heaved, I told myself that now there really was no further need to hurry. I had all of six hours left in which to meet my dead-line.

In elated mood, with a serene, friend-of-all-the-world smile on my lips, I sailed through the customs. Even my 'nothing to declare' was not frowned upon in disbelief—for once, my case was left intact. My serene countenance must have told the official more than any words.

After showing my vaccination certificate, it was only a matter of minutes before I found myself in the immigration officer's bureau.

'I'm a returning immigrant!' I beamed at him.

'Welcome home, doctor!' he greeted me affably. 'How was the trip?'

'Excellent, excellent!' I told him enthusiastically. 'Couldn't have wished for better!'

Now I had boarded the coach which was to take me to the New York Air Terminal. That little trip took only one hour—but it was an hour that was once more to effect a change in my ever rickety plans.

An Unforeseen Obstacle

I found myself next to an imposing, friendly chap on that coach. He was obviously eager for a chat. On discovering that I was a doctor, he all but embraced me.

'Why, so am I, so am I!' he proclaimed jubilantly. By the time we reached the Terminal, he was Bob and I was George.

'Sorry, Doc, what's your name?' he enquired. 'I'm Robert Coley—Doctor Robert Coley, but Bob to my pals.'

'I'm George Sava—Doctor George Sava, but George to my pals,' I was quick to respond, at all times eager to adapt myself to the customs of the countries I found myself in.

'Where're you staying in New York?' asked Bob.

'I don't really know yet,' I admitted.

'Well, why not stay at my hotel then?' he suggested eagerly. 'I'm booked at the Shelton Tower Hotel—a real nice place!'

'Why not, indeed!'

One place was as good as the next to me, so Robert Coley's choice was sure to suit me.

'O.K.—O.K., Bob,' I agreed. 'Shelton Tower it is!'

My New Friend



Doctor Robert Coley proved himself a true American. He was garrulous, a little loud and conspicuous by English standards, maybe, but sincere and likable for all that. At the Shelton Tower Hotel he was treated with respect and the management were eager to find a room for a friend of his. I could not have wished for better—a fine, attractively-furnished room with bath; Doctor Coley had insisted on the bath.

After we had both had a shower, shaved and generally erased all traces of the journey, we met in the lounge. Bob Coley was adamant—the dinner was to be on him. It was the least he could do, he explained, to repay an Englishman—even of Russian origin—for the great hospitality he had himself experienced in Britain. The least I could do, therefore, was to accept with good grace.

Towards the end of a good meal, he asked what I intended doing in New York.

‘Nothing really,’ I told him. ‘I’m on my way to California for a couple of weeks’ holiday.’

‘You’re on vacation!’ he exclaimed with glee. ‘Why, that’s wonderful—just dandy!’ He slapped me on the back forcefully in his enthusiasm. ‘If you’re on your way to California, why not let’s go together to Las Vegas?’

My New Friend

'That would be fine. But the planes don't stop at Las Vegas, do they?'

'Oh, heck, you come with me by Greyhound Bus and really get to see the States! What do you say, George?'

I had enjoyed my dinner and the two glasses of beer with it. I had also taken a liking to Bob Coley. Since my arrival, circumstances had contrived to make things as easy and congenial as possible for me. A bus-ride of 3,600 miles across the States—the prospect was an undeniably fascinating one. The thought, too, of spending a few nights in Las Vegas was hardly to be sniffed at. For who has not heard and been spell-bound by the stories of Reno and Las Vegas—of fortunes gained and lost overnight at the gambling-tables; of split-second divorces and equally speedy remarriages?

I had never been one to spurn the new, the adventurous; I loved at all times to explore grounds not yet trodden by my wandering feet. What was more natural, then, than for me to remain true to character and agree to join Coley?

The following day, a Sunday, I spent resting; Bob Coley went to see some friends. The journey from one continent to another had not in itself been physically tiring. Yet just because it was so incredibly soon done with, it was exhausting to the mind. It gave one no time at all to adjust oneself psychologically and so one was suddenly overcome by a strange, unaccountable weariness.

I wrote home and told my wife of my new friend and the journey I had agreed upon. This meant that I would spend only a little over a week in California itself.

It had been a long-standing ambition of mine to see the Southern States, so now it was I who had the next bright idea. Coley, however, easy-going chap that he was, needed little persuading—Southern Route it was! This was slightly longer, but of intense interest. It took us three days and nights from New York to Washington D.C.; on to Richmond, Virginia; Atlanta, Georgia; Memphis, Tennessee. . . .

My New Friend

Places the screen had romanticized; places steeped in traditions, where wars of freedom against the tyranny of man over man had been fought. Now they lay before us, sleepy, almost, in their lethargy. As if they had long since spent their last ounce of energy and were quite content to take a peaceful, tranquil back-seat in the turmoil of modern life.

Then came Albuquerque, New Mexico, and at the end of the third day—after driving through the desert for hours—something out of the *Arabian Nights* emerged before our eyes just as the sun was preparing to set.

For interminable miles there had been nothing but hot sand, with here and there a scattering of parched cacti. Then all of a sudden, in the middle of literally nowhere—Las Vegas! Our little bus seemed to be heading straight for the fairylands of Grimm and Andersen. Magic castles, as they sprang into view, quite fantastic in their illuminated splendour, caused me to rub furiously at my eyes in disbelief. Where was I? It was a breath-taking spectacle.

One's first impression of Las Vegas, especially at sunset, defies description. There are a hundred marvels one might mention—to leave out a thousand others. It is a web of wonders, impossible to untangle at first glance. To do it justice, one must return time and again; so that one's imagination can come to terms with one's mind and thus begin to sort itself out.

All I could remember clearly of that first night were the overpowering hotels, more like palaces set in tropical gardens. Admittedly, very modern palaces—for this was altogether a very modern fairy-tale. Swimming-pools, multi-coloured fountains and wide streets lined with rows and rows of shimmering cars!

Above all, lights—lights everywhere—green, blue, red, purple, yellow—lights inside and lights outside, lights just above and even below the pools. What secret did this mirage hold? What kind of people reigned over this kingdom—what

My New Friend

sort of life could one live here? I could but wonder and remain transfixed in my amazement.

Las Vegas is generally considered a gambler's paradise. I should have thought that 'gambler's hell' would have been a far more appropriate term, more fortunes being lost in a short time here than anywhere else on earth.

One marked difference between Las Vegas and, say, Monte Carlo is the absence of genuine pleasure and enjoyment on people's faces in Las Vegas. True enough, you can lose your fortune in Monte Carlo very swiftly too—yet the starkness of tragedy is somehow blunted. There is too much beauty and romance all around for you to be steeped in misery for any length of time. After all, there must be a vast difference between the effect upon human beings of natural beauty and that of man-made magnificence, however grandiose. Monte Carlo, like Venus, began life beautiful and her beauty spreads a contentment amongst all who come within her realm.

Las Vegas, on the other hand, like the modern star of stage or screen, has been built up from comparative plainness into cold, calculated glamour and dazzle. Stunning they may well be, yet glamour and dazzle lack the soothing warmth of natural, unsophisticated beauty; like new paint, they are glossy, shining, and very damp and cold!

What struck me almost as soon as I came into contact with my first Las Vegan was the grimness of his expression. As I looked about me, the other faces were no less set and hard. Any restaurant you chance to enter will be sure to boast of rows and rows of gambling machines, so-called 'one-armed bandits' hailing your arrival, at the ready to relieve you of your money. You can begin the sport with five cents and work your way up to one silver dollar. It sounds a trifling sum, but never fear! How that trifle can mount up!

Figures crowd around these robots for hours on end, pulling their mechanical, lifeless limbs, feeding their insatiable stomachs through their wide, slit snouts. Everyone,

My New Friend

needless to say, is determined to 'hit the jack-pot', but very few actually succeed. The majority just hang around until the early hours of the morning, not content until their last nickel has been devoured.

Reluctantly, hypnotized by the din and clang of the money, they will then wend their way homewards—to work, perhaps, for another few months. As soon as they have saved a little, they will return, still under the spell of that hypnosis, only to lose once more! How can these faces reflect an emotion they no longer experience—how can they reflect happiness? Even their one hope, that of still hitting the evasive jack-pot, finds expression only in a kind of grimace. The 'flesh-pots of Egypt' rule supreme in their lives.

Now, if by any chance slot-machines should not prove exciting enough as a means of relieving you of your money, there are always the tables, where you can lose a 'fast buck', seated in comfort in the main gambling rooms. There you can play at roulette, baccarat, twenty-one, blackjack and the all-American game of 'craps'.

Conversation at these tables is almost unheard of and would be condemned as sacrilege, so devout are the adherents to this particular cult, so intense their religious concentration!

My advice to any aspiring visitor to Las Vegas is therefore: don't ever go there with more money than you intend or can afford to lose, no matter how strong you deem your ability to resist the devil. Believe me, once you begin to play you are irretrievably lost!

The whole atmosphere—the gambling fever—grips you, clutches you as if with a thousand tentacles; you cannot stop; you go on and on to your last dollar or even your last nickel. The saddest part of all this is that I speak from the heart—from experience!

My new friend Bob Coley and I went to a restaurant with the sole, innocent intention of having dinner, or so we

My New Friend

thought. After that we had planned to do some sight-seeing—sights illuminated by the combined efforts of the moon and neon-lights.

I was determined to see this city at close quarters—this city not only of lost fortunes, but of lost lives, of marriages torn asunder and dropped casually, as it were, out of the window.

During dinner, snatches of various conversations reached our ears. Strangely enough, they were all about the most fantastic wins at the casinos—the making of enormous fortunes. Not once did we hear even a murmur about a loss!

To my right sat an elderly gentleman, who informed his companion with glee of the 150,000 dollars Nick the Greek had raked in, all in one magic night. He quite omitted to relate how much the same Nick had eventually lost or what, in the end, befell this child of fortune.

At the table opposite sat a blowsy, peroxide blonde, telling her partner a most interesting story:

‘Now this gal—Jeannie, you know—well, she just had to pawn her weddin’ ring after her divorce. Off she went with the “dough” to the nearest casino—and, brother, did she win a fortune! A helluva fortune, I can tell you!’ She paused to get her second wind. ‘She wen’ an’ bought herself some shack, a motor—an’ natch a new man!’

I was riveted to my seat by this last revelation. Came ten o’clock and coffee and I knew there was nothing else for it—I too had to make my fortune! Surely, even if I were not to win a ‘helluva fortune’, I could spare twenty dollars. It would be worth the experience, any time!

Never were twenty dollars more reluctant to part from my wallet! Instead, they increased and multiplied with frightening urgency, until they became one hundred. I should, of course, have stopped then. But did I?

Back they went, one after the other—quicker, even, than they had come—taking with them for good measure an extra

My New Friend

few dollars over my twenty-dollar limit. Now the avalanche was really on its way, there was no stopping it! On and on it rolled, until by about four in the morning it had buried three hundred and eighty of the four hundred dollars that were to see me through my holidays! Bleary-eyed, I stared at my last twenty-dollar bill in complete stupefaction. . . .

Just in case anyone should be curious to know exactly which game was the culprit . . . I fear I could not supply that information. You see, in all fairness I must admit that I tried them all—so one was as guilty as the next.

One thing only was abundantly clear. By seven in the morning I was faced with an insurmountable problem. What now? Quite obviously, I hadn't sufficient money for two days, let alone almost two weeks! I had my return ticket from New York, true; but how did one get to New York from Las Vegas on twenty dollars?

Ah, Bob Coley—fancy forgetting—why, my friend would help, to be sure! I went in search of him with renewed hope. It was no easy task, though, to find anyone amid the grey smoke, the din and the sea of blurred faces.

When at length I extricated him from his table and hustled him into a corner for a chat, I learned of what had befallen him. He had fared, if anything, slightly worse than I, being left with only a ten-dollar bill. In fact, he told me with a strained grin, he had hoped that I would be able to come to his rescue. Unlike myself, his ten dollars would at least buy him a ticket home to Carson City, Nevada. This cost eight dollars and would still leave him with two dollars for a substantial breakfast.

My twenty dollars, I learned, could buy me a bus-ride to Los Angeles—eighteen dollars. So I, too, would still have two dollars left for breakfast.

So we had breakfast, though with none too keen appetites. Neither of us felt particularly inclined to much talk by that time; we shook hands, Bob tried hard to give me a wink

My New Friend

which somehow misfired and we went in search of our respective buses.

Already I had conceived a vague idea of my next move. I had friends in Los Angeles, so I would go to one of them and ask for a loan. With this I would buy a ticket to New York and take the next plane back to London. A short holiday, indeed, even by my unconventional standards—yet what else could I do?

However, by the time I arrived in Los Angeles, these plans were tossed aside once again. The thought of asking for a loan from someone I had not seen for such a long time went acutely against the grain. It was more than my pride would permit.

During that final bus-ride I had ransacked all my pockets with the thoroughness of a madman, and lo and behold, I had discovered another six dollars! I was thus able to spend the night at a motel. By morning, after a long, refreshing sleep and a cool, soothing dip in the pool, both my mind and body were re-invigorated and alert.

As I walked out of the motel, instead of heading for some friend's house, therefore, I found myself making my way to the Medical Agency. Some years previously this same agency had found me work, which I had never taken up.

No sooner had I put my head round the door than I recognized the man sitting behind the immaculate, polished desk. He was the self-same man who had found me the job all those years ago! Not that he hadn't aged, but then, hadn't I?

We greeted each other warmly. I did not find it difficult to relate to him exactly what had happened to me. Being a natural, straightforward fellow, he made no attempt at suppressing his mirth when I came to the highlight of my tale of woe. Suddenly seeing it with his eyes, even I had to join in his laughter. Yet in defence of my dignity, I pretended to grumble:

My New Friend

'It's easy enough for you to laugh! But believe me, I'm at my wits' end—what on earth shall I do? I can't even pay for another night at the motel—that is, unless you'd like to lend me five dollars, by any chance?'

'Tut, tut! Come off it, Dr. Sava—quit worryin'—I'll lend you fifty dollars, if you like! You can always pay me back from your salary!'

'Salary . . . ? What salary? I thought I told you I haven't got a job!'

'Sure, sure—so you did,' he replied in a tone more suitable to calming an over-excited child. 'But that was before you came to see me! Things have changed—now you've gotten yourself a job, Dr. Sava, that's all!' He chuckled merrily.

'I have, have I? Oh, I see!'

He now became the no-nonsense businessman and scanned his register of vacant appointments in rapt concentration. After a few moments of this, he turned to me once more. 'You know about the Kaiser Hospitals, don't you?'

'I should say I do! I did my internship in one of them,' I told him a trifle dreamily, memories of that period crowding in on me.

'That's just dandy—'cos that's where you're going, Dr. Sava!'

When he realized that I had no intention of making any comment just then, he hastily continued:

'At their Fontana Hospital one of the surgeons has suddenly been taken ill. So now they're in a real fix! They need an experienced surgeon to take over immediately, for about a month. Their fee's 1,500 dollars.' He cleared his throat before adding, 'Less my ten per cent commission, of course!' His wide, open grin was most likable.

I was elated, but before revealing this, I decided on prudence. 'Where's Fontana—and how do you know whether I'm the man they're looking for?'

'Fontana is fifty miles out in the desert,' he told me

My New Friend

patiently. 'You're not just the man they're looking for, Dr. Sava—you are the answer to their prayers!' He seemed quite in earnest. 'Only this morning they were on the phone to me. Boy, they sure sounded desperate!' He whistled through his teeth in emphasis, then continued:

'They told me that they would accept any reputable, qualified surgeon—all I had to do was to find one for them in a hurry!'

'Yes, but . . .' I got no further, however.

'So when I send them a man like yourself, Doctor, they just won't be able to believe their luck!'

Without giving me time for any further argument he lifted the receiver. Dialling a number, he asked for the Medical Superintendent of the Kaiser Hospital in Fontana. The latter was informed of my qualifications and given a very much curtailed version of the reason for my immediate availability. The conversation was short and to the point; soon it was over.

The agent replaced the receiver, beamed at me and said: 'Well, Dr. Sava, as I told you, the job is yours!'

'Wonderful!' I beamed back at him. 'When do I start?'

'Tonight, if you like!' He lit a cigarette in reward for a job well done. 'Well, not later than tomorrow morning, anyway.'

'Fine, fine,' was all I could think of saying.

Tom, Dick and Harry

The clock struck ten as I shook hands with my admirable agent. In no more than five minutes this veritable wizard had found me employment—the only way out of my present predicament. In a few more hours I would be presenting myself at my new hospital. I had already come to the conclusion that it would be wisest for me to go there that same evening. That way I would be certain of a good rest and would also be on the spot ready for work the next morning.

Almost at the door now, I felt a tap on my shoulder. 'Not so fast, Dr. Sava,' the agent rebuked me. 'How d'you reckon you'll get to Fontana?'

'By bus, I suppose,' I answered in resignation.

'That'll be darned difficult,' said he, shaking his head doubtfully, 'if not downright impossible!'

Anyone acquainted with California will see his point only too readily. For in this land of the motor-car—and especially in California, where there are two cars to every three people—the greatest feat by far is to make do without one. The distances are quite formidable. Yet to Californians, who love to travel, they present no problem. To a stranger, however, it is almost inconceivable that one could find oneself making a forty-mile journey to one's place of business—even though residing in the self-same street one worked in!

Tom, Dick and Harry

On one of my previous visits to California, I stayed at a hotel on Sunset Boulevard. One fine morning I set off on a visit to a friend, also living on Sunset Boulevard. What was more natural than to walk to a house in the same street? So, quite unsuspectingly, I walked and walked—and walked—for over an hour! In the end I just had to give up and hail a taxi in sheer desperation. It so happened, as I know now, that the entire length of the boulevard measures thirty-seven miles! Most unfortunately, also, my friend had chosen to live almost the whole of the thirty-seven miles away from my particular hotel!

Therefore the reason for my agent's concern was instantly clear to me. Bus transport in California is very infrequent and the drivers—also compelled to act as conductors—overworked and none too polite.

Even if you do happen to board the right bus, if you are unfamiliar with the place, the immense speed of the vehicle and the inaudible mumble of the driver will be certain to take you well past your stop. Nothing for it, then, but to jump off—in the middle of nowhere—walk back and wait for the bus going in the opposite direction, with very likely the same results!

Now with Fontana I was completely unfamiliar. I was told, however, that though it was only a small town of some 30,000 inhabitants, it extended vastly in area, as did most towns in California. What then if the doctors' quarters were ten miles distant from the hospital? Rely on buses?

Thus, apart from my initial journey to Fontana, there was the added problem of transport once I began duties there. All this flashed through my mind. Then, on the spur of the moment, I made a bold decision.

This same agent, Leo Harris, had shown himself exceedingly friendly and helpful throughout, to the extent, even, of advancing a comparative stranger fifty dollars. Why couldn't I go just one step further—and ask him for the

Tom, Dick and Harry

advance of half my salary? That would come to about seven hundred dollars—what harm in asking? He could only refuse! Knowing how business-like an American could be—business was business—I was certain that I would not place him in an awkward or embarrassing position. If he found it impossible to oblige he would not hesitate to give me an outright 'No'.

'Mr. Harris,' I ventured, 'would you think it very impertinent of me if I were to ask you for one final favour?'

Without a second's hesitation, he smiled encouragingly. 'Name it, Dr. Sava—you bet I'll do it if I can!'

'Well then . . . ' I steeled myself by clearing my throat. 'When did you say I'd receive my first pay-packet?'

'Two weeks from today, Doctor.' Though he must have been curious to know what this was leading up to, he was courteous enough to let me continue uninterrupted. 'And how much would that come to?' I paused momentarily, then added: 'Less your commission, of course!'

He replied after a slight delay; quite obviously he was calculating the exact amount, judging from the figures that came rolling from his lips. 'About six hundred dollars,' he informed me triumphantly at last. 'Don't let's forget the Federal Tax and Insurance—quite apart from my commission, eh, Doctor?'

Ignoring his last reminder, I stated as casually as I had the nerve to: 'That would just about do it.' I purposely gave friend Harris little time to puzzle over what would do what! 'Do you think you might be able to advance me all of that sum?' I asked. 'Then—then I could get myself a second-hand car, you see!'

In the silence that ensued I had the unpleasant sensation that this time he was going to refuse. However, with that grin of his, broader than ever, he told me:

'O.K., Doctor, I'll risk it—seeing it's you! After all, six hundred dollars shouldn't break me!'

Tom, Dick and Harry

'Oh, Mr. Harris!' I exclaimed. 'Thank you, thank you very much indeed! I just can't tell you how much I appreciate this!'

'Oh, forget it, Dr. Sava!' he mumbled, a very distinct flush spreading over his face. This time I really had managed to embarrass this stalwart American.

With the money securely tucked away, I now left Mr. Harris's office bursting with plans and feeling all of ten feet tall! There was a great deal to attend to and nothing spurs me to action more than the knowledge that there is precious little time to act in!

The Medical Agency, like most business agencies, was situated 'down-town'. Only two blocks away, I was dazzled by rows and rows of second-hand car lots. That there was no shortage of used cars in Los Angeles, no one could dispute!

It was in Figueroa Street that I found myself, the lower end of which is known as the car dealers' domain. There you have the choice of hundreds of cars, ranging in price from twenty-five dollars to two or three thousand. Not having been recommended to any particular dealer, I simply came to a halt when I spotted a display of cars roughly in my price-bracket.

I was enjoying myself leisurely examining the files of machines when I was approached by a tall, bronzed, rugged young man. To be quite frank, my opinion of second-hand car dealers, which is shared by many other people, was, as a rule, none too complimentary. Yet once already that morning I had experienced great kindness at the hands of an American. Vastly encouraged, therefore, I was inclined to be more open-minded even about an American car dealer—and what a handsome specimen of American manhood he was!

In answer to his gleaming smile of welcome, I stretched out my hand—an Italian custom I had not yet shaken off—and bade him good morning. 'I wonder if you can help me?' My question seemed to put him out of gear somewhat—

Tom, Dick and Harry

maybe I had recently come to look like a man who wished only to borrow money? The thought was rather frightening, so I proceeded to put the dealer, at least, out of his misery.

'I'm an English doctor,' I started to explain. 'Just arrived from London.' His immediate interest made me go even further. 'I've taken on a temporary post in Fontana and right now I've precious little money at my disposal! Now could you find me a good, reliable car that will get me to Fontana safe and sound—not stranded somewhere in the middle of the desert?'

'Doc!' he exclaimed with typical American disdain for formality. 'If I ain't got the very thing for ya! A buddy of mine only just turned in his old Cadillac for a new one—it's just the job for ya—a damn good machine, I can tell ya!' And he added: 'Jeez, it won't only take you to Fontana but to New York and back—if ya wanna!'

At his mention of the word 'Cadillac' I must have shrunk visibly. For wasn't a Cadillac, even second-hand, in the Rolls-Royce class? The silly lad; hadn't I told him that I was short of money?

Car dealers invariably seem to be great psychologists, whatever their age, and this one read my fears from my face. 'Doc,' he assured me, 'you'll have to go searchin' high and low till you find a better jalopy in the whole length of California—at one hundred and ninety dollars!'

'What—a hundred and ninety dollars for a Cadillac?' I shouted.

'Sure, Doctor—but it is seven years old,' he said with an almost apologetic air.

Good old America! One hundred and ninety dollars for a seven years old Cadillac—pew!

'And that includes tax and registration,' he saw fit to add.

'It's a deal!' said I in haste, fearful lest someone snatch this miraculous bargain right from under my European nose.

Tom, Dick and Harry

'By the way'—I suddenly remembered I had left a trifling matter unattended—'my bargain, where is it—could I see it?'

'Why sure!' He slapped me heartily on the back. 'You like your little joke, Doc, don't ya?' he laughed. 'Come on, let's go see "your bargain"!'

'Yes, sir!' as the Americans might say, 'my' car was quite a looker! Of a two-tone blue in colour, it sported automatic gears, heater and radio. From where I stood, she seemed endowed with 'the lot'! Anyway, I liked her at first sight—rather fortunate, really, since I had already agreed to buy her!

'Doc, just before you sign, I'd like you to drive round the block in her,' the dealer reminded me.

'Thanks,' I said, 'but I've got a better idea. I like your car and I'm taking her. But I'd like you to drive me to the nearest Driving Licence Office—you see, I haven't an American licence and I don't suppose an English one will do!'

'Gee, Doc, I'm sure glad you brought that up! I'll say an English one won't do here! But ain't you got an international drivin' licence?'

'No, I'm afraid I haven't,' I had to admit.

He was deep in thought for a minute. 'I know where I'll take you,' he suddenly told me proudly. 'I'm quite pally with one of the examiners not far from here—he shouldn't be too hard on you. We'll get down to his office right away.'

Lady Luck had certainly taken a fancy to me that day. Wherever I went she was at my side. Within half an hour, I had signed the necessary papers and the insurance was taken out with the dealer himself. For, need I mention it—he was also an insurance agent!

At a quarter to twelve I presented myself at the Driving Licence Office, in the company of this young man, who had so obviously taken me under his wing—the second American to do so that day.

Tom, Dick and Harry

Introducing the examiner to me with 'This guy here's a buddy of mine!' he gave me a wink, called 'Good luck, Doc!' and was gone before I could thank him once more.

'Lemme get you fixed up,' said the examiner without further ado. 'I guess you won't mind answering a few written questions?'

'I guess not,' I replied with a serious face.

These 'few' written questions amounted to no less than forty in all. Printed answers were provided for each one and a cross was to be put at the side of those you judged correctly answered; a blank was to be left for the wrong replies. Six mistakes was the maximum one might make; over that, one failed and could not apply for a licence again for three months.

I placed my crosses and handed the paper over to the examiner. Two mistakes only—so far, so good! Next came the vision test. I was asked to read letters from various distances and judge colour-lights; first with one eye, then with the other and finally with both. Not being colour-blind or short-sighted, I passed easily enough.

Now for the driving-test—in my own car! I took my seat behind the wheel, the examiner beside me with pencil and paper in hand—at the ready to note down all my driving transgressions.

'O.K., let's go,' he commanded.

We drove around the block for about ten minutes. Each time he gave the order, I obeyed. There were the traffic-signals and pedestrian-crossings to heed; reversing into a parking-space; revealing my ability to stop instantly in an emergency.

Obviously I had carried out all of these tasks to his satisfaction. For as soon as we were back in his office, he told me: 'You have made it, Doctor!' and handed me a sheet of paper. I glanced at it—ninety marks out of a hundred. Not too bad for a 'beginner'!

Tom, Dick and Harry

Having paid my five dollars, I was given a temporary licence. My permanent one would not arrive from Sacramento for another four weeks and this required the imprint of my thumb on it. As a last formality, therefore, my thumbprint was taken.

I left my new address, that of the Fontana Hospital, and departed in even higher spirits. Now for my luggage back at the motel and I was all set to start for Fontana. I couldn't resist treating myself to a really hearty lunch, over which I did a little straight thinking.

Now that I was to stay four more weeks, it would be nice to have my wife here, I pondered. She would love the country and climate; would thrive on the informal, healthy outdoor life—yes, she must come.

As ever, no sooner had I come to a decision than I acted upon it! As soon as I had swallowed my last bite, I drove to the nearest telegraph office and sent this wire:

'COME AS SOON AS POSSIBLE NEW ADDRESS KAISER HOSPITAL FONTANA LETTER FOLLOWS.'

My bill was settled; I was rich, with more than three hundred dollars still to my credit.

On and on I drove, through the highways and byways—fifty-seven miles of unfamiliar, often bewildering yet always intriguing country. Then I perceived a sign: FONTANA, and below, the words: KAISER HOSPITAL.

I came to a halt outside a large, impressive building. Momentarily I paused before entering. So this was to be my working base for the next four weeks!

A smart little receptionist ushered me into the office of the Chief Surgeon, who was to be my immediate superior and was also Director of the hospital. He was a man in his early forties. Though friendly enough, he was brusque and forthright in his manner, plainly not a man given to idle

Tom, Dick and Harry

chatter. He had been expecting me and rose immediately at my entrance, to shake me by the hand.

'Glad to meet you, Dr. Sava! Very good of you to oblige at such short notice,' he said with sincerity.

'Not at all,' I replied, a trifle meekly.

'Before we go any further, I'm Dr. Thomas Morton—or, rather, Tom to my friends. O.K., George?' There was a distinct twinkle in his eye. In his own abrupt way, Dr. Morton managed to be exceptionally amiable.

'Yes, Tom, that certainly is O.K. by me,' I replied happily, already feeling less strange.

'Now let's go and meet a few of our doctors and give you some idea of the way this hospital is run.'

We walked along spotlessly clean corridors; inspected the modern operating theatres with none of the very latest equipment wanting. We visited emergency and other wards, all of them friendly and comfortable, and saw the X-ray departments. This was a hospital after my own heart—well-organized, splendidly equipped and from all appearances run with deft, capable hands.

It was in one of the operating theatres that I first made Richard Wander's acquaintance. I learned that he was the Chief of the Chest Surgery Department. That he was also one of the most efficient and skilled thoracic surgeons I was to observe later!

He too, had made no bones about his preference for Christian names, thereby underlining once again the American dislike of formality—no matter in what class or station in life. My own Christian name began to take on a new significance; already Richard Wander too was using it—and I calling him Dick.

'Tom, Dick—where's Harry?' I could not help joking to myself. Yet this playful thought was soon to become reality—not such an uncommon occurrence with me—for Harry actually materialized!

Tom, Dick and Harry

The last of the trio I encountered in the orthopaedic department. He was Dr. Harold Morris—Harry to his friends, of course—late of Cornell University, New York.

At half past six, the four of us sat down to a first-class dinner. It was incredible how rapidly I had become one of them, with what ease they had instantly accepted me!

‘You’d better take one of the hospital rooms for tonight, George,’ suggested the Director. ‘You’ll need all the rest you can get, I’m sure!’

As I had suspected, the doctors’ quarters really were almost ten miles distant from the hospital—distance means nothing in California. More and more I loved my Cadillac!

Yet another unsuspected issue emerged through my overnight stay at the hospital. My poor wife, receiving a telegram in which the only address stated was that of a hospital, naturally did not think of connecting it with work. For this was to have been a holiday ‘away from it all’; had I myself not been at much pains to point this out? Who could blame her, therefore, if she began to fear all manner of terrible things?

At nine o’clock that night I was called to the hospital phone—a personal call for George Sava! The distraught voice at the other end, almost unrecognizable as that of my wife, thrust frantic questions at me. ‘George, George—is that you—is that really you? Are you all right? Why on earth are you in hospital—did you have an accident?’

When I managed to interrupt her, I hastily told her: ‘No, darling—I’m not ill at all, I haven’t had an accident either. Calm yourself!’

‘Oh, thank heavens,’ came the deep sigh of relief. ‘Then why on earth are you staying in a hospital?’ she suddenly remembered.

‘I’ve taken a temporary job here and I’d like you to join me—since I have to stay a month!’

My wife had obviously regained her composure somewhat, for she said with a relieved laugh: ‘I must be getting stupid

Tom, Dick and Harry

—I really must be! Fancy my not guessing straightaway—when have you ever been able to stay idle for long?’

Much as I liked the compliment, I had to own up.

‘Well, dear—it’s not quite like that, I’m afraid. To be quite frank, I had no option—that is, unless I wanted to starve!’

‘But, George—there you go again! You took some money with you. How did you manage to lose it?’

‘Gambling, my dear,’ I told her, and just then the pips began to interrupt, so I cannot relate Jane’s exact words at the revelation I had just made. All I heard her say hurriedly was:

‘I’d better come—you’re just not safe on your own! See you very soon, darling!’

Surgical Assistant



There are quite a few disadvantages attached to my profession that I could pick out at random. Yet how many professions are there—if any—that are entirely free from faults or shortcomings? One advantage, however, of being a surgeon does deserve a special mention. Whatever country you may find yourself in, whether your help is required by white, black or yellow patients, your own daily routine will not suffer any great upheaval. It should still follow much the same pattern; though, of course, working conditions are bound to differ. Yet these are only slight, subtle differences; for as with love, surgery speaks a universal language and defies all boundaries. Its chief task never strays far from its accepted formula!

So I, too, felt at ease when once again I slipped back into my surgeon's routine. We are all creatures of habit, and much as I had wanted this holiday, I was glad, if the truth be known, that fate had so cleverly tricked me out of it.

That my month of duty was to be spent at a Kaiser Foundation Hospital gave me the added opportunity of studying that organization at first hand—something I had not had the leisure to do during my internship.

America has no officially recognized State Medical Health Service. Most hospitals are in private hands and treatment in

Surgical Assistant

them is very expensive. The reason for this is not so much that surgeons' fees are excessive—these are relatively no higher than in most other countries—but that the paraphernalia that goes with treatment is so very involved and costly. In the end, the cost invariably soars to astronomical figures. It would, therefore, not be unreasonable to suppose that an ordinary operation for appendicitis or hernia could wipe out the entire savings of a middle-class family.

In any other country once a surgeon diagnosed acute appendicitis he would simply arrange for his patient to be admitted to a hospital or a private clinic of his or the patient's choosing. He would then be at liberty to get on with the removal of the appendix.

Not so in America! You may well be a splendid diagnostician; to you it may be an indisputable certainty that your patient suffers from acute appendicitis. Yet can you go ahead and operate? Decidedly not! Not, that is, unless you have first had X-rays taken; then seen to the blood tests and the ascertaining of blood groups. Still you are nowhere near done, for now follow all manner of laboratory examinations. All this to make one hundred per cent sure that this is, without even a shadow of a doubt—a case of acute appendicitis!

Having at last reached the stage of removal, should you recognize the said appendix as gangrenous or perforated, do not, for the love of yourself and your hospital, just dispose of it by doing some such normal thing as throwing it into a receptacle! Instead send it straightaway to a pathologist for yet another examination! The latter will, in return, present you with a written report, verifying the fact that it really was gangrenous—which is where you came in!

These frantic inspections play no small part in increasing the bill enormously, to the lasting sorrow of the patient. Yet, as we shall see, it is this self-same patient who is really responsible for the whole, often downright ludicrous, procedure.

Surgical Assistant

I had already in the past had more than an inkling of all this, but having been out of the country for some time, it had quite slipped my mind. However, on that very first day at the hospital it was to be brought home to me once again in such an unmistakable way that henceforth my memory would suffer no more lapses.

Tom, the Chief Surgeon, had asked me to take over for the afternoon. He had some business to attend to in Los Angeles, he explained.

'Gladly!' I told him.

'Sure you don't mind on your first day, George?' he inquired apologetically.

'No, really, Tom, I'm just itching to get busy again! I'd love to get my hands on a really offending appendix. That would do nicely for a start!'

'Let's hope you get your wish!' Tom humoured me.

Little did I dream that only half an hour after this exchange with Tom I would, indeed, be given just that opportunity.

Round about two in the afternoon a young boy was brought into the hospital suffering from severe stomach-ache. After examining him thoroughly there existed not the slightest doubt in my mind that this was a case of acute appendicitis, on the verge of perforation. I only hoped that it was not already perforated!

Seeing that every moment counts, particularly with younger people, I ordered an immediate operation. Had this been London, Rome—or anywhere else in Europe for that matter—I would have operated on that boy within half an hour. But this was America!

When I asked for the instant use of the operating theatre, I was told politely but very firmly by the theatre sister:

'That's quite impossible, sir!'

'Why, in heaven's name, Sister?' I burst out in amazement. 'The theatre isn't occupied!'

Surgical Assistant

'No, Doctor,' she told me. 'But you couldn't possibly complete all the necessary examinations in half an hour!'

'What examinations do you mean, Sister? Surely you don't think that I haven't examined him? It's a clear case of acute appendicitis. I ought to recognize one by now, you know. I've only been at this game for almost thirty years!'

She smiled at my last remark, but was not to be dissuaded. 'Sure, Doctor, I don't doubt you're right—but rules are rules!' Evading my eyes, she continued, 'Maybe you wouldn't mind discussing the matter with Dr. Gonzales who's on duty with you. He'll be acting as your assistant, anyway.'

'All right, Sister!' She was, after all, only doing what she knew she must do, I supposed—although it seemed a lot of fuss about nothing.

I went and discussed the case with Gonzales, the young Cuban house surgeon. He was an extremely nice fellow and had already completed three years' training at various American hospitals.

'Yes, Dr. Sava,' he told me. 'Sister is quite right!'

'Is she, by Jove!' I snorted.

'No, really! We must take X-rays to see if there's any gas inside the abdomen. That would confirm the perforation of the appendix, or, on the other hand, exclude a perforated ulcer; don't you see?'

'A perforated ulcer in a boy of fourteen?' I exclaimed with a somewhat derisive smile.

'I agree, sir, more than unlikely! But . . .'

'Rules are rules!' I completed the sentence for him.

'Exactly!' he concluded.

'Right, Dr. Gonzales. If that is the rule, then please order the X-rays!'

The X-rays were followed by blood tests. Now we had to count the number of white blood corpuscles. Should they be above fifteen thousand per c.mm., then that would be

Surgical Assistant

definite proof of an acute appendicitis. If that were not the case, more blood tests would be required to discover the real malady. Nor did we omit to match and cross-match the patient's blood, so that if blood transfusion were needed we would know his blood group without any more delay.

Unbelievable as it may appear, by the time the boy was actually wheeled into the operating theatre the dial of the hospital clock had shifted from a modest two to a full-blown five! For as luck would have it the pathologist had been absent and had only made his appearance at four o'clock; this helped to delay us even further. The poor boy therefore had to wait and endure the pain for three hours, until at long last I was legally within my rights in removing his gangrenous appendix!

Once I had removed it, I was actually on the verge of committing an even more dastardly offence! I disposed of the appendix in the normal way, but the assistant hastily retrieved it and placed it with loving care in a glass jar.

'This . . . this . . .' he stuttered, quite alarmed, 'has to go to the pathological department for further examination, sir!' He appeared short of breath from the shock and exertion I had caused him.

'Oh, dear,' I apologized. 'There's so much I've forgotten about America!'

'You'll soon get used to it, sir,' he tried to console me.

'I'd better!' I smiled a trifle wanly.

Over dinner that night I could restrain myself no longer and discussed the whole matter with Tom.

'My dear George,' said he with a patient smile, 'it's purely routine—American routine—and has no reflection on you whatsoever!'

'That's a relief, anyway!' I admitted. 'But why, Tom? Are American doctors that unreliable? Are they so uncertain of their own diagnosis?' Maybe this was not the most tactful way of phrasing it, but I felt rather strongly about it.

Surgical Assistant

'No, no! We're as confident, I hope, as you are in Europe! But if I failed to carry out all these tests, I might place us all in a pretty nasty position. For if, only by the remotest chance, the case turned out not to be appendicitis—Lord, what a mess! The surgeon and the hospital would be sued at the snap of a finger—for damages that could well amount to thousands of dollars!'

'I see, I see!' I conceded. 'But no wonder a straightforward appendix operation costs hundreds of dollars! These tests must cost a small fortune, surely!' Reflecting for a moment, I then added:

'Look, Tom, the tests before the operation do make sense under the circumstances. But why waste even more money on a gangrenous appendix—once it's already removed?'

'Sure,' he nodded, 'it does seem strange! But don't forget—only you and the theatre staff really know for certain. What of the relatives? In this country, they must be able to see in black and white that without the ghost of a doubt it really was gangrenous!' And he added, rather sadly, I thought, 'Our word alone would never do, George!' Then he brightened.

'On the other hand, you must admit that this is a safeguard against unscrupulous surgeons—healthy appendixes could quite easily be removed, with no one the wiser!'

This I could not refute. Then a frightening thought struck me. 'What—what does happen then, if—heaven forbid—someone really does make a genuine error and removes a healthy appendix?'

Smiling patiently, Tom told me: 'If all the tests are carried out according to rules, this is just what should never happen! But if it did, your own and the hospital's bank account would be the best proof of what an expensive error it was!'

Here, then, we have the reason for the high costs of surgery in America. Surgeons and hospitals must take every possible step to protect themselves from any and every

Surgical Assistant

eventuality. They are thus compelled to take out almost grotesque malpractice insurances, costing literally hundreds of dollars a year in premiums.

It is all a vicious circle, really; all these expenses have to be covered somehow. Hence, the bill presented to the patient—the one against whom all these precautions are taken in the first place—mounts and mounts!

We all know, of course, that America is a wealthy country and that its citizens are individualists. They much prefer to pay for everything themselves. Even these individualists, however, do not possess unlimited funds and many of them are quite unable to afford such sums at all. Since, as I have already said, they do not have a State-run National Health Service, they have resorted to the next best thing: the private medical insurances.

Here they have a very fair number to choose from. Some undertake to pay only part of the bill; some cover as much as three-quarters. This, not unnaturally, depends on the amount of premium the subscriber is prepared to pay. Undoubtedly one of the best of all these health insurance schemes is the Kaiser Foundation Health Plan.

Originally it was intended only for employees of the numerous Kaiser enterprises and their immediate dependants. These enterprises embrace all kinds of undertakings, ranging from foundries to ship-yards. But the scheme soon proved so successful that it was eventually decided to extend it to any outsider who wished to join. For a few dollars a month the insured and his family are guaranteed complete care in sickness. Dental services alone are excluded from the scheme, which, with this one exception, covers every form of ill-health. I believe that the Kaiser Health Plan is about the nearest to our own National Health Service of any privately-run schemes.

Just how much success this and similar schemes have achieved can be easily assessed. The mere fact that Kaiser

Surgical Assistant

began with one small hospital only a few years back and have since increased this to nearly a dozen should give a clear enough illustration.

These are not second-rate hospitals either; far from it! They are impressive, beautiful modern buildings with first-rate equipment. Their popularity is such that they are still constantly on the increase.

The American medical profession, unfortunately, does not take too kindly, on the whole, to such insurance plans. They are inclined to regard them as an encroachment upon their private patients and thus a threat to their income. Yet the medical men who do belong to these schemes are, almost without exception, of the very first calibre.

'Money is the root of all evil,' goes the well-worn proverb. Fortunately, Kaiser not only refused to adhere to this notion, but chose to make nonsense of it altogether. The organizers of all these schemes are quite prepared to admit openly that if you want a good thing—something of quality—you must inevitably pay for it. This, of course, applies equally to men of medicine.

For instance, a man of Tom's surgical skill and ability, who is fully employed by Kaiser, can earn anything up to thirty-five thousand dollars a year. Nor is that all. He is given his own office and a paid secretary, and is substantially insured by his employers against any case of alleged malpractice that some individual may decide to concoct against him.

Every two years he is automatically entitled to a brand-new car. Naturally, he and all his family also receive a very comprehensive health insurance policy. Of late, even old age pension has been added to this substantial list; so that when a Kaiser surgeon retires, even if he does not do so exactly like a 'Kaiser', at least he retires in comfort.

To reach this high standard of living, together with all the other benefits Kaiser offer, a surgeon in private practice

Surgical Assistant

would have to net at least fifty or sixty thousand dollars per annum. This is surely rather a high income, in any country or currency.

The next few days which followed my first operation at Kaiser Hospital—the appendicitis—I spent in assisting Tom. This was certainly a stroke of good luck, as I soon realized. For had I been searching for someone to aid me in brushing up my abdominal surgery, I never could have found anyone more competent than Tom.

He was a Boston graduate and thus trained in the high tradition of Boston surgery. He specialized particularly in abdominal surgery—one of my own pet subjects, as it happens.

The very first operation I was to help Tom with was the removal of practically the whole of a large intestine. The patient was an elderly woman suffering from ulcerative colitis—a disease generally dreaded by surgeons the world over. For only with such drastic surgery as the removal of the whole of the large intestine could one hope to cure the patient.

With amazingly sure dexterity Tom now began to dissect the left portion of the large intestine—the descending colon. His was the combination of natural gift and carefully studied knowledge which alone can produce a surgeon of the highest order.

For half an hour we worked in silence and I did my utmost to be an assistant worthy of such a master. All at once Tom stopped. He regarded me—a friendly, encouraging smile playing round his mouth. Then he handed me the knife and the forceps.

‘O.K., George—now I’d like to see what you can do!’

This was a compliment, indeed—all the more welcome for its utter unexpectedness, if one stopped to consider that this was probably one of the most difficult operations to perform.

‘Thanks, Tom, I’d like to show you,’ I said simply and proceeded with the work.

Surgical Assistant

I could certainly not hope to come anywhere within the realm of Tom's perfection; but some kind of innate pride seemed to fortify and enhance my own skill. I was determined not to fail or disappoint this trusting friend and superior.

Operation followed operation. Each, if not more complicated, at least quite as exacting as the one before it. Stomach ulcers were operated on with a competence nothing short of awe-inspiring. Stones were removed from gall-bladders and kidneys with an ease which made the operations appear deceptively simple and straightforward.

And all the time, under one pretext or another, Tom would see to it that at least part of each intervention was left to me to perform. Gratefully I did my best, of course, but here, satisfactory as I must have proved myself, Tom was the undisputed master.

I was certainly not surprised, then, that this able man had been created Chief Surgeon at the unusually early age of thirty-five. But what of Tom the man, the human being? The remarkable thing about him was that his character well matched his surgical endowments. He was a good, steady friend and, even more important, a considerate superior! He was Tom not only to his equals but also to his assistants and even his house surgeons. To me he was to become, first and foremost, a friend.

He was well aware of the fact that I had been trained in Europe. This, in itself, could so easily have given rise to differences of opinion as to the merits of one technique as opposed to another. Yet not with Tom! At all times he showed the utmost respect for my own training and skill. What was more, he revealed great interest, which could not have been merely courtesy—in any technique, however new or foreign to him.

Invariably, each morning, Tom and I would discuss the cases in hand for the day. More than once he paid me the compliment of adopting a technique I had suggested; instead

Surgical Assistant

of one with which he was himself familiar and to which he would certainly have resorted had it not been for my presence.

Those ten days spent working with Tom were tinged with regret because they had to end so soon. But I shall always look back upon that short period with the utmost pleasure and satisfaction. How pleasant it would have been to work for ten months instead of ten days with a surgeon of Tom's ability! Nevertheless one must never forget to be grateful for even such short moments—and that is exactly what I am!

When I was detached from his department, I felt distinctly sad as if uprooted from a place in which I would have been very happy to settle. I was soon to learn that it was in order to assist Dick, the head of thoracic and cardiac surgery, that I had to leave Tom—and at the time I rather resented the change.

12614

Dick the Master

If I was sad and resentful at having to leave Tom's department, it was to be a very short-lived depression. For it evaporated almost the moment I began working with Dick. It made me feel a somewhat fickle character, that I should recover so rapidly from my disappointment. Yet in this profession one's loyalties must by force of necessity be equally divided among all the branches of surgery; especially so when only acting as a temporary substitute, as I had agreed to do.

Tom had obviously come to the conclusion that to assign one particular department to me for so short a term as a month would be quite impossible. Far better for me to help the other heads of various sections, thereby relieving them, for a short while at least, of some of their numerous tasks.

In the beginning, before I had performed my first operation with Dick, I was slightly anxious as to how I would react to the tall, somewhat aloof thoracic surgeon, who was a complete contrast to Tom. I felt I did not yet know him at all. He was given to long periods of silence and I could hardly be blamed for suspecting that he was not susceptible to quick friendships. While Tom had at first impressed me as rather abrupt in manner but none the less desirous of making a friend of you, Dick struck me as entirely uninterested in the ordinary commonplace affairs of life and people.

Dick the Master

He seemed to have built a tower around himself to which it was not easy to gain access. There were times when, quite frankly, I had thought him a difficult man to work with.

Soon enough I awoke to the realization that these were only first impressions—very superficial ones, as it turned out. He was to reveal himself at heart as a sensitive and kindly man. It was due perhaps to his Anglo-Saxon origin that he was an introvert and incapable at first of abandoning his innate restraint. But so often it happens, with a person difficult to approach, that once that forbidding tower begins to show cracks, finally to topple and fall, you suddenly discover that a wonderful trust and warmth has taken its place.

There was another thing, moreover, that Dick quite unmistakably had in common with Tom. He, too, was a first-class surgeon. Once again I was supremely fortunate in spending the major part of my stay at the hospital with a thoracic surgeon of Dick's quality—could I have asked for better? But have I not already mentioned that Kaiser believed in acquiring only the finest men? They had certainly lived up to their principles in Fontana!

Thoracic surgery had always fascinated me; but until then I had been afforded little opportunity of gaining much practical experience in this branch. Thus everything that Dick did was new and of immense interest to me.

Dick was soon to make it abundantly clear that he looked upon me as an equal. Naturally, though, we did not discuss the choice of techniques or methods as Tom and I had enjoyed doing, for here I had quite frankly none to suggest. I gladly accepted Dick's technique and even after I had grown a little more experienced I was still convinced—as, indeed, I am to this day—that it was first-rate.

I must apologize if I am inclined to eulogize over the talents of my Fontana colleagues, or if these praises sound too glowing or excessive. Yet if I am to be truthful, how can I possibly stint appreciation where it is so genuinely merited?

Dick the Master

It was a Monday morning. I scrubbed and prepared to help Dick with the removal of a lung. The patient was an elderly woman, suffering from severe emphysema of the left lung; complicated even further by loss of elasticity of the lung tissue.

Emphysema itself is another way of saying that the lung is unable to contract and expand normally. This results in constant shortness of breath in the victim. It was also making her extremely prone to lung infections and frequent catarrhal attacks. In cases such as these, where other treatment is no longer effective, modern surgery can step in, to give lasting relief.

Part of the lung, sometimes even the whole of it, is removed, depending on how far advanced the condition is. This is surgery at its most earnest, surgery at its most demanding!

Without so much as uttering a sound Dick motioned me to stand opposite him. With only a few, well-calculated strokes from a sure, trained and adroit hand he slit open the left side of the patient's chest. Everything that followed proceeded methodically but none the less with considerable speed. This swiftness was surprising, since as a rule American surgeons are inclined to make it their business to work slowly. Dick, however, was not the man to follow blindly any accepted rule or standard. He acted strictly on the promptings of his personal intelligence and conscience. Should he have his own ideas on the subject—and he most frequently did have—he would stick to them. So it was with this operation; his method demanded swiftness and no one would deter him from it.

His rapidity by no means prevented him from working with care and thoroughness. He left no blood-vessels untied, however small or seemingly irrelevant to the final outcome of the operation.

Only a few more moments and we were able to inspect the chest cavity. Both of us realized, after close inspection, that at least two-thirds of the lung would have to be removed.

Dick the Master

All the speed, assurance and neatness in his work, which Dick displayed so admirably, certainly impressed me in his favour. This was work executed to my liking; for I, too, take some pride in thinking of myself as a swift and neat surgeon. Dick, the surgeon, was one after my own heart.

In the past, I had frequently been irritated when having to assist a deliberately slow surgeon. Fumbling in surgery is more than just tedious—it is unnecessary and often dangerous! Dick, therefore, endeared himself to me, even on that very first ‘combined operation’ of ours.

Not surprisingly, Dick’s talents did not go unrecognized. He was a man much sought after professionally and certainly one of the busiest surgeons I had ever encountered. By a rule of the hospital, the length of time per day which a surgeon was permitted to devote to work was limited by rota. To my mind this was a most sensible rule, since an overtired, overstrained surgeon cannot possibly be in top form or give of his best. These rules, of course, had to be relaxed in cases of emergency or shortage of staff. Yet as far as possible they were strictly adhered to.

Dick would very often require other assistants besides myself to help him out with his ever-mounting tasks. So already, during that first operation, while he was in the throes of removing the diseased lung, a plan had formed in my mind. I, too, had been assigned a fair share of the work—tying blood-vessels was only one of the jobs Dick had asked me to do.

The operation took us an hour. The next one on the list was the removal of a portion of the gullet. The case was quite clearly that of a patient suffering from cancer of the oesophagus.

I was surprised that I was not listed for this second operation. Instead, I read the name of another assistant. Dick must have presumed that one operation in a morning would be quite enough to begin with. Quite obviously he did not yet know George Sava—and this is where the latter would put his plan into action!

Dick the Master

As Dr. Wander was preparing for his second intervention, I said as casually as possible: 'Dick, could I ask you a favour?'

'Sure thing, George—what is it?' he replied spontaneously, while continuing with his preparations.

'I should very much like to assist you at all your operations—if you'll let me!'

He stopped in his task, looked at me and smiled. It was the first time I had seen him smile thus: a smile from the heart reaching not only his lips but his eyes. It lit up his whole face and changed it instantly. The severe expression had vanished, to be replaced by a gentle, amiable and very charming one.

'I'd be most happy to have your help all the time—but . . .' He faltered and I was afraid that he was about to think up some feeble excuse. 'You won't be paid here for overtime, I'm afraid. Any work done over your schedule, unless expressly asked for, is not paid for by the hospital, you know!'

'That, my dear Dr. Wander, is my very last concern, I assure you!'

Again that encouraging smile of his, so I continued: 'The only reason for my request is that I want to learn anything, or rather all you can possibly teach me, in thoracic surgery.'

Modest as he was, he was obviously pleased, but made certain of camouflaging any emotion by teasing me: 'I say, George, you're not by any chance thinking of setting up in competition now, are you, old boy?'

'You never can tell, buddy!' I joked in return, [quite unaware at the time that I had rarely spoken a truer word!]

Only a few weeks later I was indeed to have ample opportunity to put into practice Dick's teaching. How invaluable these practical instructions were to become to me; how grateful I was, too, for my own zeal for study! Most of all, however, I was grateful to Dick's generous willingness to accept me as his 'assistant'.

Still, why digress? So far, my 'two weeks' holiday' promised

Dick the Master

at least to terminate after its double run of a month. That same night, after my first session with Dick, I had an important appointment. My wife was arriving from London. Thrilled as a schoolboy who has successfully played truant and is now reaping his reward, I would go to the air terminal to meet her.

My Las Vegas disaster had, in all fairness, turned out to be quite a blessing in disguise. Even if this was hardly a 'holiday away from it all', it was still a most satisfying experience. What is more, my wife, too, would now benefit from her husband's gambling escapades—in a round-about kind of fashion. So what matter if he had lost his shirt?

By the time Dick and I were about to leave the operating theatre for the last time that day, it was well past five. The lung case, immediately followed by the gullet case, only made up the first half of the list, in the crowded day of a surgeon like Dr. Richard Wander.

A child was to follow these, suffering from a cyst in the chest. Finally, another lady with a nasty goitre. The latter was dealt with in the thoracic department at Fontana—which merely meant that more work fell to Dick. Yet in my opinion, although not the common practice, this is the correct approach. Very often goitre can be lodged under the chest-bone and will therefore require partial opening of the chest. Who better than a chest-surgeon to handle this? Here, too, I was destined to come into the picture.

Dick had suddenly turned to me to ask, as if by the merest chance, whether I had myself ever operated on goitres. Whether it was intuition on his part, or simply a desire to be friendly and courteous, I cannot say. I could, however, reply in all truth and sincerity:

'Yes, Dick, I most certainly have—and not a few times, either!'

Goitre operations in England and most other parts of Europe are in the domain of the general surgeon. Apart from

Dick the Master

this, my training in Germany and in the Midlands had provided me with considerable opportunity to practise these operations. For in those places goitre is an every-day occurrence—a malady every general surgeon encounters again and again.

At times I had been consulted upon as many as six goitre cases in one single day, all of which I had had to operate on. I was not shy now in informing Dick of this. Let me confess, here and now, that I do not list false modesty as one of my virtues—but then I do not list false modesty as a virtue!

Dr. Wander listened intently and when I had finished speaking he said calmly: 'O.K., George, that's just what I hoped to hear!'

'You did?'

'Sure! And I've got news for you—you're going to be the surgeon on this next case!'

'Doc!' I exclaimed in my best imitation American. 'You've got yourself a surgeon!'

'Hold it—there is one condition,' threatened Dick.

'Oh!' My face must have dropped at least half an inch. 'And that is?'

He seemed in no undue hurry to put me out of my misery. Quite unashamedly, he was enjoying his little 'cat and mouse' game with the temporary surgeon-cum-assistant from Europe.

'You're going to apply your own technique this time!' So that was all he wanted!

'Because, my dear Dr. Sava, for a little change, we would like to take a lesson from you!' And he added with a sly wink, 'Savvy?' I liked this man more and more.

'So now you're going to set up in competition to me, Dr. Wander, is that it?' How could I resist hurling back his own gibe at him? For a limited time Dick joined in my mirth, but refrained from any further comment. The long exchange between us must have been more than enough for him. Soon he reverted to his silent self.

Dick the Master

Our conversation, however, had been overheard by others. I was to discover quite a sizeable audience at my goitre operation. Even Tom and Harry were somehow conjured up from out of their maze of duties—suddenly at liberty—to witness my operation!

Nor was it idle curiosity on their part, of that I am convinced! Theirs was simply an undisguised desire, so like my own, to add to their knowledge and witness the work of another surgeon—particularly one from an entirely different school.

Most American surgeons are at all times extremely keen on comparing notes with other colleagues, especially so if these colleagues chance to come from Europe. This much I had already found out. This was yet another reason why in America I was never in the least hesitant to reveal my desire to gather new methods and ideas on surgery.

My operation lasted less than three-quarters of an hour. I removed the large goitre—neatly, I like to think—practically without bleeding. To judge from the general reaction, I must have acquitted myself with credit. For as soon as the operation was terminated and the patient wheeled out, all my new friends were eager to show their approval and congratulated me warmly. It was easy to sense by their tone of voice that this was no mere attempt at courtesy. Their sincerity was unmistakable. Most gratifying of all, perhaps, I found Dick's reaction.

As we walked along the corridor of the hospital that evening, at long last on our way out, Dick stopped me by placing a hand on my arm. 'George,' he said without ceremony, 'come and spend the evening with us! I'd kind of like to have you meet the wife and kids!'

'Why, Dick,' I said in very genuine surprise, 'that's really nice of you!'

'Then you will?' he asked, pleasure ringing in his voice.

Dick the Master

What a different man stood here to the man I had begun working with only that morning! Of course it was not Dick who had changed; merely that now I was able to see him clearly without the bias of a stranger. In return, sensitive chap that he was, he had begun little by little to creep out of his shell.

There was nothing, therefore, I hated more than having to rebuff him in his first effort at friendliness, outside the theatre. But my wife did, after all, have pride of place!

'Dick, there's nothing I'd like better than to meet your family and have a good, long chat with you—but tonight it just isn't possible.'

'Oh heck!' The upright Dick actually swore. 'That's a real pity!'

'Yes, it is, Dick. But, you see, my wife arrives from London in a couple of hours, so naturally I must meet her at the airport—you do understand, don't you?'

'You bet I understand!' He grinned.

Hastily I suggested: 'How about some other night—maybe I could bring my wife as well?'

'Swell! Then we can get to know your better half and, if I know women, the two of them will probably be up half the night comparing notes on fashion!'

So this was the silent, uncommunicative Dr. Wander! Why, off duty the man was positively garrulous! If I had not had to rush off, I think he might quite possibly have detained me in conversation for a while yet.

'Some other night, then?'

'Fine, George. Let's fix a definite date tomorrow, shall we? Oh, and please pay my respects to the wife. You can tell her from me that her husband sure knows how to operate on a goitre! So long, George!'

And with another smile the once silent Dr. Richard Wander stepped into the brilliant Californian sunshine.

Home Hazards



The day's achievements caused me not a little pleasure; my mood was as bubbly as the best champagne. With a veritable flourish, I made myself comfortable behind the wheel of my beloved old Cadillac.

The plane on which my wife was due to arrive covered the Northern Route, heading straight for the North Pole; it was not expected to touch down until about seven in the evening. With over an hour still to spare, I could well afford to take the drive leisurely and enjoy the warm, scented air of a Californian evening. After interminable hours in the ether-laden atmosphere of the hospital, I could hardly get my fill of nature's exotic perfume. Greedily, ravenously, I inhaled for all I was worth; feeling a little more intoxicated with every new breath I took.

Like a drunkard, I waved to all and sundry, enjoying myself in particular with my newly-acquired greeting of 'Hi!' I roared a wolfish 'Hi!' at bronzed, long-legged lovelies in incredibly short shorts; a rather more demure 'Hi!' at gigantic, broad-shouldered, deeply sun-burnt labourers; but my most cheerful 'Hi!' was reserved for the scores of ruddy-cheeked youngsters heading for the beach with eager haste.

If only at least one of my own, I thought, could be amongst this healthy, carefree lot—what joy this renegade of a father would be blessed with!

Home Hazards

'Now then, Sava, don't be greedy!' I began to admonish myself sternly, as was my habit. 'You can't have everything—and you're already doing nicely with Jane all but here, to supply you with a few home comforts!'

Humming to myself in an endeavour to dismiss once and for all that uninvited cloud that had so suddenly appeared on my clear horizon, I drew up outside Los Angeles Airport. At a quarter to seven I entered the airport lounge. The pretty receptionist informed me that the plane was on schedule and should arrive at any moment. Unfortunately I was not allowed up to the barrier to meet my wife, since passengers were obliged to go through the customary formalities on arrival from overseas. So I waited patiently in the lounge, seated in the most comfortable chair I could find.

Having spent quite a fatiguing day and with the added excitement of my wife's coming, I felt myself growing drowsier and drowsier. Once or twice I remember trying desperately hard to force open my eyes. In the end, nevertheless, I must have dozed off.

'Daddy!' called an all-too-familiar child's voice. Ah, what a pleasant dream—what a lovely sound! I did not for the moment wish to waken, lest the delight of the sensation fade as suddenly as it had come!

This dream, however, was becoming altogether too life-like. For now I could even feel a determined little tug at my sleeve, accompanied once more by that sweet voice.

'Dad, wake up!'

Startled, I opened my eyes to realize with amazement that I had not been dreaming. Before me, in all his tiny glory, stood my youngest, five-year-old boy!

'Gregory!' I exclaimed, jumping from my chair. 'I thought I was dreaming—is it really you, you little scamp?' I grabbed hold of him and kissed his little face unashamedly. As I released him at last, I beheld the smiling face of my wife.

'Hello, darling—surprised?' she teased, as we embraced.

Home Hazards

'Surprised is hardly the word!'

'Well, dear, it isn't only you who can spring surprises—I thought I'd have a go for a change!'

'You . . . !' I waved a threatening finger at her.

'Seriously, George, you're not cross, are you? I just couldn't leave him all alone with nanny—with the others away at school he'd have been so miserable, don't you agree?'

'Of course I agree, Jane! And I'm not cross—on the contrary! You've made my pleasure complete; almost as if you'd brought him in answer to my unspoken prayer!'

Later there would be time to tell Jane of the sudden longing in my heart on the way to the airport. Right now, I was too surprised by its realization!

Meanwhile the mischievous little object—cause of all this emotion within me—did not take his eyes off my face! All three feet of him trying, no doubt, to acclimatize himself once more to the big man he was in the habit of addressing as 'Dad'.

It was grand to be together again. We walked hand in hand, my wife, Gregory and I, with the porter a few paces behind, and came to a halt by my Cadillac. I had intended to introduce wife and son to this esteemed possession of mine with a flourish of pride and showmanship. Yet if I had hoped to cause a stir, I had quite another reaction coming!

'Good Lord!' exclaimed my wife, in unmistakable dismay. 'George, is that—did you mean—does it really go, too?'

'Why, Jane, what on earth do you mean—my Cadillac! You do realize, I hope, that it's a Cadillac!' I could hardly take this insult lying down! 'Huh, she doesn't just go, my dear, she flies!'

Yet at heart I could hardly blame my wife for showing such lack of respect for my car. Compared to the gleaming beauties flashing all around us, mine looked a bit like Cinderella—after the stroke of midnight!

Home Hazards

On the drive to Fontana, my wife wanted to hear all about my Las Vegas adventure in detail. I, on the other hand, was far more eager to tell her of my present work. I must unwittingly have spoken with such feeling and enthusiasm that she thought it necessary to remind me: 'George, dear, remember, won't you, that you're only here on a holiday!' And in the driving mirror I could clearly see a wicked little grin on her face. 'Don't you let yourself get carried away again!'

'Most certainly not!' I pooh-poohed her warning. 'It's only temporary—anyway, the other doctor returns in a few weeks' time.'

'Oh well, that's all right then!' she remarked with a sigh of relief.

'All the same, you're going to spend two wonderful weeks in the desert—that I promise you both!'

'Ooh, desert, Daddy!' chirped in Gregory. 'Will I see lots of lions and tigers and elephants and—and——?' He was quite beside himself.

'You little silly! You're getting it mixed up with the jungle, aren't you?'

'S'ppose so,' he agreed disappointedly. Then he had another bright thought. 'At least there must be some snakes!'

'Mm, possibly,' I smiled. 'Only I haven't seen any. Maybe when they find out you're here, they'll all come running to say hello to you!'

While my son was content to give this a little further thought, my wife swallowed hard. 'I hope not!' she said.

As we approached the Kaiser Hospital I pointed it out to them, but drove straight past. I headed for the desert, where, I had been told, I would have a wide choice of good motels. I had been expressly advised to choose a motel in preference to the more conventional hotel. For in the former one could rent a small, self-contained apartment, far more suited to family life.

Home Hazards

It was easy enough to find a motel—far too easy, for it made the ultimate choice all the more difficult. Eventually, we decided on the third one we saw, for the sole reason that its sumptuous swimming pool attracted both my wife and young Gregory.

We clambered out of the car, glad of the chance to stretch our limbs. At the reception desk of the motel with the tempting swimming pool a friendly woman greeted us.

'Yes, sir, we've got two apartments vacant right now,' she told us. 'One of them is next to our own.' Smiling down at Gregory, she suggested: 'It might be a good idea if you took that one, 'cause I've got a li'le girl too!' As if on cue, a pretty little thing of about seven skipped up to her.

'This is Debby!' her mother introduced her proudly. 'What's *her* name?' she asked my wife, pointing to our son! Gregory, however, gave his mother no time for explanation. Angrily, with unlimited disdain, he protested: 'I'm not a girl, I'm a boy!' as if he had just been dealt the most deadly insult.

The motel proprietress was by no means to be the only one to make this mistake—merely the first of many. During our stay in California, poor Gregory was practically always taken for a girl. Nor were his trousers of much assistance in establishing the sex he was so proud to belong to, since most children—girls as well as boys—were constantly clad in playsuits or jeans. He was of sturdy enough build; but again, so were numerous little American girls. To crown it all, quite literally, Gregory sported a mop of golden curls, worn longer than was the custom in America. My wife, proud of his beautiful hair, had not the heart to crop it in the current fashion. So admittedly the error was understandable!

Time and again, during our American 'vacation', I was to protest to my wife that she might be harming the child by her obstinacy in refusing to part with his locks. 'Jane, dear,' I would venture gently, 'I know you like his hair long, but this is the land of the crew-cut. Don't you think there

Home Hazards

must be dozens of boys who'd have equally pretty curls if their mothers let them? Now, if they can bear the sacrifice—why can't you?

'I can't, George,' she would moan.

'Listen, Jane, you don't want to turn him into a little sissy, do you? What if other boys mock him—d'you want him to be miserable?'

'George,' she reasoned softly, 'don't go making a mountain out of a mole-hill! He's a contented, happy, normal little boy. He's a beautiful little boy just now, but all too soon he'll lose his teeth, his hair will darken and he'll be the average, grubby little boy in a grey flannel suit. Let me have the pleasure of it while it lasts.'

It seemed to me to be a typical woman's argument, but I suppose there are some mysteries about a woman and a mother that a man—even a surgeon—will never be able to fathom!

Be that as it may, Gregory had to suffer this constant confusion of his manhood with the opposite sex. But fortunately this confusion never lasted long. For if anyone was able to hold his ground, it was my little Gregory! Master Sava was quite willing to demonstrate by words, or even deeds if necessary, that he was very masculine and courageous indeed.

Quite a romance was to develop between the pretty Debby and my son. We had taken the apartment next to the proprietors and on the next day Debby had lost no time in initiating Gregory into the secrets of the desert. He was to see no elephants, lions, tigers or snakes, it is true. Instead, at lunch-time, when my wife called him in for his meal, Greg stalked in with an unidentifiable object under his arm. On closer inspection, this object turned out to be some sort of box, which he now chose to deposit right on top of the table—what is more, next to my wife's plate—while he proclaimed with immense satisfaction:

Home Hazards

'Look what I've got, Mummy and Daddy!' And he lifted the top off the box.

There was a deafening shriek, as an enormous brown lizard leaped from the box and all but landed in my wife's soup. In a shaky voice, Jane pleaded, 'For heaven's sake, Gregory—take that ghastly creature away!'

Our son looked at his mother, his face the picture of wronged innocence. Meanwhile, Jane had jumped up from her chair and had rushed over to mine, as if seeking protection.

'Now, Jane,' I smiled at her. 'They're quite harmless really, not poisonous at all!'

'Still,' she persisted, 'I don't much fancy that under our roof, do you?'

Though I refrained diplomatically from replying, I certainly did not cherish the idea of living with a lizard as a bed-companion!

On the point of grabbing the lizard by its tail, I noticed the hurt, startled look of disappointment on Gregory's face. To him this was anything but a monster. He seemed, for some reason of his own, to adore it.

We just had to find some way of allowing him to keep it—and we did! Debby and he, with a little assistance from me, built a shelter for it in the garden. We used the thick cardboard cartons from the drug-store for padding. In no time at all we had a veritable army of lizards as the children collected them—a motley array of browns, greens and yellows. The children were in their element and even I began to have a soft spot for them when I witnessed the joy these ugly little reptiles could produce on the faces of the youngsters.

Our next visitors, however, were not to prove either as harmless or as lovable! The day after my wife's and son's arrival, I had asked Dick for the morning off. I wanted to show them around a little and accompany them on their first visit to the enormous 'drug-store'. The expedition became particularly enjoyable and charming, because of its complete

Home Hazards

novelty. Jane and Gregory could barely get their fill of the unusual displays in the maze-like stores. Jane's fingers, especially, itched to possess all she perceived and my wallet became a great deal lighter in the process.

Laden with literally dozens of parcels—nearly all of them American food specialities—we arrived back at our apartment. It really was a nice little home we had found for ourselves. The rooms were friendly and air-conditioned; the kitchen small and compact, with every modern amenity. It would, in fact, have made a pleasant enough residence, even for a longer period.

Our first family lunch in California had been somewhat upset by the dramatic arrival of the lizard. The dinner the next evening was to have even more startling repercussions! Not the dinner itself, that is—this went off well enough. We had earlier on been at pains to select some of our favourite dishes and were well content. Gregory, tired out after an eventful day, made no protests for once at being put to bed early.

Jane and I chatted a while longer and watched 'Lucy's' madcap exploits on television. But we had spent a very full day, too, and decided to make an early night of it. Besides, I had to start work before eight the next morning.

It must have been well after midnight when I was awakened by a nasty burning, irritating sensation all over my body. Hastily, I switched on my bedside lamp and threw off the bed-clothes, fearing that they might be alight. By then my wife had also woken up and was complaining of the same tortures.

What we saw was rather shattering. For literally thousands of coal-black insects were swarming all over the room. Not a nook was free of them: ants—nothing but revolting ants! On the bed, below the bed; on our clothes, inside our clothes; they mountaineered over our shoes, went exploring inside them—not to mention crawling over ourselves!

Home Hazards

When we eventually reached the kitchen—every step complicated and in slow motion as in a dream—we gasped in horror. All our food in the grocery cupboard was swarming with these tiny, crawling, messy insects! Most of all, they favoured the sweet dishes, connoisseurs that they were! The white sugar had begun to look like black caviar, the only argument against this being that we knew full well we had bought no caviar of any colour! The jamjars had suddenly come to life, bustling grotesquely with living, miniature blackcurrants. In fact, none of the food was what it appeared to be—all we could clearly identify was ants!

My wife went quickly into Gregory's room, but fortunately the ants had not yet penetrated there and he slept peacefully.

We had to obtain immediate help, that much was evident. I stumbled to the door of the proprietor's apartment barefoot; need I mention that my slippers were infested with—ants? Unsteadily, I rang the bell.

It was Debby's father who opened the door. I do believe that he was a great deal more flabbergasted at the sight of the barefoot, pyjama-clad European doctor than he was at the cause of my sudden appearance in the middle of the night. The ants themselves seemed to leave him quite unruffled and unimpressed.

It soon dawned on me that ants were no uncommon phenomenon here. The man must have felt sorry for us and thought us not a little 'nuts' for causing this rumpus over such a trifling matter as ants! But at any rate he was as helpful as he could possibly be. He accompanied me back to our apartment, armed with various sprays and bottles of uncertain contents. Vigorously he went to work with the sprays and did not leave off until every corner of our apartment had been flooded with the deadly stuff. This stalwart warrior knew his ants, undoubtedly; what he did not know was how actually to rid us of them! For we still had exactly the same number of ants as before, with one subtle difference.

Home Hazards

Each and every one of them was now as dead as a door-nail!

First thing next morning, the entire place was cleaned from top to bottom and fumigated with admirable thoroughness. Naturally, all the food had to be thrown out—unfit even for the birds! This operation was so meticulously executed that nevermore were we to suffer another ant invasion.

Meanwhile, these home-hazards did not deter me from continuing my work at Dick's side. Work, moreover, which I found wholly satisfying and which filled me with serene happiness. Each day I would either assist at or even partly perform thoracic operations. These were still new to me, of course, but I was learning very fast! At the termination of my two weeks' duty with Dr. Wander, I could justifiably consider myself, at least, not the worst of thoracic surgeons.

My wife and son took to desert life like fish to water. Jane and Mrs. Wander frequently made shopping expeditions and all three of us settled down quite contentedly. However there was yet another little adventure lying in wait for us!

About a week after we had settled at the motel, I phoned Mr. Harris, the agent. I wanted to know whether he had received the money I had sent and to thank him once more for his generosity. In the course of our conversation I told him also of my wife's and son's arrival. 'I don't mind telling you, Harris, that I'm really enjoying life out here,' I admitted gaily.

'That I'm real glad to hear, Dr. Sava! By the way, there wasn't any hurry with the money, y'know. Still, thanks anyway, for letting me have it back this quick. You British are O.K.—yes sir!'

'The thanks should all come from me!'

'Now, Dr. Sava, I told you—please forget it!' I wondered mischievously if friend Harris were turning crimson with embarrassment at his end of the line.

Home Hazards

'I say,' Harris now remarked breezily. 'Why don't you and your wife come and spend an evening with us—we'd just love to meet her!'

'We'd be delighted!' I replied with genuine pleasure.

'Why not let's make it tomorrow evening, then—if you are free, that is?'

'Tomorrow will suit us fine.'

'Swell!' exclaimed Harris enthusiastically.

'What time would you like us to come?' I just remembered to ask.

'Oh, will eight be O.K. for you?'

'Just right,' said I. Only the next night, I could have eaten those last words of mine—I very nearly had to, anyway!

We left Gregory in the care of Debby's mother and the two children were fast asleep in Debby's room by the time we set off for Los Angeles.

Not unnaturally, we had assumed that our invitation for eight o'clock in the evening stood for a dinner-invitation. We therefore took great care not to be unpunctual and even contrived to arrive a few minutes before eight.

Leo Harris—Leo, to his friends—greeted me like a long-lost bosom-pal. I, too, was delighted to see once more the architect of all my Californian bliss! Soon he took us into a spacious lounge and introduced us to the rest of the little gathering. There were his wife, an attractive, friendly woman slightly on the plump side, his wife's 'Ma' and another couple. The inevitable, well-intentioned questioning now commenced.

'What d'you think of California?' enquired Mrs. Harris.

'It's beautiful—and so warm!' Jane told her.

'D'you find us ver' different?' This from mother-in-law.

'Yes and no!' I replied, well aware that it was not the profoundest of retorts. Yet when making small-talk profound replies are hardly called for, especially when no profound questions are forthcoming!

Home Hazards

The superficial conversation ebbed and flowed merrily, in a sea of high-pitched voices.

'I love that dress, Mrs. Sava—is it real silk?' the female half of the couple asked.

'Yes, yes, it is. I'm so glad you like it.'

'Real cute! You English do have such lovely dresses; a friend of mine brought back six—all genuine silk dresses—when she returned from Europe. All of 'em British, mind—and they were the cutest!' she told us with superb aplomb.

Thus it continued. Much time seemed to have elapsed since our arrival at the Harris's house. I might not have been quite so aware of this had not my stomach been so insistent upon reminding me with constant, protesting, grumbling rumbles.

It was ten o'clock!

'Ah, here we are at last—food!' I consoled myself optimistically, as Mrs. Harris entered with an enormous tray. Yet as the tray came more clearly into view, I saw to my disappointment that it held nothing more substantial than cups of coffee and 'cookies'!

Only then did I see the light! American dinner-time was six or six-thirty at the latest, never eight! We might not have made the error but for our long stay in Rome, where dinner might commence any time after nine, certainly not before!

There was nothing we could do now, save grin and bear it. The Harrises were such nice people that the last thing I wanted to do was to offend them by leaving early. They were, after all, only adhering to their national custom, when all was said and done. In America, as indeed in England, it was the accepted thing to invite people for after-dinner drinks or coffee.

When midnight struck we both felt that at last it was quite safe to make our exit. I think that, taking our gnawing hunger into consideration, we did this as gracefully as ever

Home Hazards

two famished mortals did. Why, we even managed to restrain ourselves from sprinting to the car!

Once inside the car, my wife, quite as ravenous as I, took one long look at my sunken, pale face and burst into loud laughter. I joined in her hilarity only too readily. When Jane at last stopped laughing and had wiped the tears from her eyes, she commanded in mock severity: 'Drive on, George! Don't spare the horses!'

I knew well enough what she meant. Away I sped, keeping a greedy look-out for the first restaurant in sight.

'There!' we shouted in unison—but unfortunately it turned out to be a garage.

'Bother,' said Jane.

'Look, George, there's one—can you see?'

'You bet I can!' Impatiently I parked the car and bolted inside, with Jane close at my heels.

'The menu!' commanded Jane once more, only this time her command was directed at the waitress. Rudely almost, she grabbed the meagre bill of fare, looked at it for less than a couple of seconds, then told the astonished girl:

'The lot!'

To Harry's Aid

One week with Tom, two weeks with Dick—three weeks in all—had passed already, before I was to make my final change-over at Fontana. This time I did not feel quite so badly about having to move on once more; I knew it was inevitable and had thus expected it. Besides, these changes were a source of novelty and instruction. Thirsty, as always, for yet more knowledge and experience, I almost looked forward to devoting myself to yet another branch of surgery in such a short period of time.

It would undoubtedly be more than somewhat presumptuous of me to claim that two weeks would suffice to glean all there is to know about thoracic surgery; of course not! Nevertheless one must not ignore the fact that I was already a fully-fledged general surgeon. In the course of those two weeks with Dick I had witnessed over thirty interventions in thoracic surgery alone! Every kind of malady the human lung and heart can be afflicted with had reared its ungainly head during those hectic days. Therefore, as a mere refresher course, I considered this short term ample.

Now it was Dr. Harry Moss's turn to receive my assistance in his orthopaedic department. Harry, chief of that department, was entirely different from the others of the Kaiser outfit, as I was soon to discover. He embodied all the very

To Harry's Aid

finest qualities to be found in Jewish doctors. Short of stature—fragile almost—inoffensive in manner, dark-eyed and attractive in appearance, he was the perfect example of the efficient, highly sensitive and intelligent Jewish surgeon. Nothing in the line of his work was ever too much for this dedicated, industrious, hard-working man!

Had you chanced to come across him in the street, you would not have given him a second glance, simply because he was as modest in dress as he was in demeanour. Even at the hospital he would be the last to throw his weight about, let alone lose his temper—either with superiors or his own staff.

Instead of demanding, as was his right, he always asked, almost begged for something to be done. Instead of giving an order, he made it appear as if he were asking for a favour. It did not surprise me in the least, therefore, that Harry was the most popular surgeon at the hospital, and it thrilled me not a little when this man became one of my best friends.

Unlike my first day with Dick or even with Tom, I felt that Harry and I suited each other to perfection, from the very first moment I joined his team. To see us standing next to each other must have been quite an amusing sight—the Laurel and Hardy of the hospital! For physically we were poles apart. While he was small and slight, I was tall and rather large in frame and girth. He was calm and even-tempered; I was emotional and moody. Yet somehow we formed a splendidly balanced team. I had hardly ever worked more in harmony or with a nicer man.

‘There he goes again,’ I can hear my reader sigh, ‘with his superlatives for the surgeons at the Kaiser Hospital!’ Yet even at the risk of repeating myself, I simply cannot stress often enough how deserving each of these three are, of all the praise I am able to give them. A rarer, more select trio of brilliant surgeons I at least was never to encounter again. So how can I now omit Harry, whose surgical skill

To Harry's Aid

equalled that of his colleagues, yet whose gentle friendliness perhaps even surpassed theirs?

Then there was another coincidence. Though Harry Moss was trained in New York and I on the Continent, our ideas on surgery, our techniques even, were almost identical. Whereas with Tom and Dick I had felt a welcome visitor—here I was at home!

On the Monday of my last week of office at Fontana, the first case on the list was a patient with a slipped disc. As a rule slipped discs are treated by neuro-surgeons. At Fontana, however, these cases were allocated to Harry Moss. What a revelation it was to be for me when I assisted him on these!

Gently, but with firm, unfaltering strokes, he divided the spinal muscles and laid bare the lumbar portion of the spine. Not a single erring gesture; not one unnecessary drop of blood. Harry certainly belonged to the select number of highly meticulous surgeons and even the bleeding of one tiny capillary would have upset him.

I was truly in my element—this was my kind of surgery! Elegant, efficient, rapid; no fussing, no unnecessary instruments to impede one's movements or obstruct the field of vision. Harry wanted only the instruments that were strictly necessary at hand: props like retractors and scissors.

I was keen not only to learn, but also to prove myself useful. With the electric cautery in one hand and a swab in the other, I followed his every movement, not allowing one drop of blood to escape.

It is often said that an efficient assistant is not so far removed in importance from the surgeon himself. Be that as it may, while this particular surgeon was acting as assistant, he tried his utmost to lighten the surgeon's task—recalling only too clearly how often he himself would have given his 'kingdom' for an able assistant!

In major surgery such as slipped disc operations the surgeon sometimes has to change position with his assistant, if

To Harry's Aid

the part he wishes to reach is more easily accessible from the latter's side. This, of course, is necessary only when the assistant is still rather raw and inexperienced in his work.

With Harry and myself it was altogether different. Harry had, no doubt, already picked up a few details about me from Tom and Dick. Apart from that, he must himself have realized in next to no time that I could not only assist, but could also share his work in part during an operation. Thus, if a section to be removed happened to be more accessible from where I stood at the time, he would hand me knife or scissors, as a matter of course. Not a word was spoken, not a moment wasted! Harry did not approve of talking during an operation. As he liked to put it: 'I do all my yapping out of working hours.'

Somehow, as if by telepathy, I anticipated each of his movements. This enabled him to complete the operation in half his usual time. I could not help thinking that our teamwork did not fall far short of being inspired. Here I had certainly found my surgical mate!

When that day drew to its close, and our four operations were completed, I did not feel in the least tired. As I had been after that first day with Dick, so now, too, I was in wonderful spirits. I well remember sitting in the doctors' room, with a cup of coffee beside me, as I did each day before setting off for home. The theatre sister had entered, apparently to have a word with one of the other doctors in the room.

Unexpectedly, she turned to me and said with a warm smile: 'Dr. Sava, please allow me to congratulate you on your assistance to Dr. Moss!'

'Why, thank you, Sister! But as you probably know better than I—he's rather a wonderful man to work with, don't you agree?'

'Oh yes, indeed,' she exclaimed eagerly. 'Dr. Moss is one of the best—one of the very best!' There was sincere affection in her voice. From one so businesslike and almost severe,

To Harry's Aid

it was a testimony of admiration that was quite singular. What finer reward could Harry ask than to be thus taken to the hearts of his entire staff? I had never met a more popular man and never one who more deserved this popularity!

The week had almost pirouetted by with the agility of a ballerina, and I had not had time to catch my breath and take stock. Little wonder, then, that it outdid the other three weeks in gratifying, inspiring work. Yet here was I, already standing near the close of my temporary engagement at Fontana.

It was on Thursday afternoon at about four when Tom entered our operating theatre. We were on the point of setting a fractured hip and Harry was busy selecting the steel pin that would be driven into the fragments of the fracture.

Tom stood there for a while, in absolute silence. Undoubtedly, he waited for us to fix the fracture—the major part of the operation. Only when this had been done did he turn to Harry and say in his suave, very distinct Bostonian English:

‘May I interrupt you for a brief moment, gentlemen?’

We both stopped and smiled up at him. ‘What gives, Tom—why all the sudden formality?’ Harry asked with obvious amusement. ‘Nothing wrong, I hope?’ His face became serious.

‘No, no, not a thing! I just want to have a word with our British friend here!’ Tom told us, his tone even more serious though quite unmistakably simulated.

I decided to join in the game. ‘Well, now, Tom . . .’ My voice, I hoped, sounded very hurt. ‘That’s if I may still call you Tom. Up to now, your British friend’s name was George—at least to his friends. Why the sudden change of atmosphere?’

‘There’s no change—you’re still George to me! But since I’m here on official business today, as Chief of Staff—well, you understand, don’t you?’

‘Oho, quite, quite, I do understand!’ And I paused. ‘In

To Harry's Aid

that case, sir, what can I do for you?' I asked stiffly, standing to attention.

This was more than even the staunch Tom could stomach. I suppose that the portly George Sava hardly made the most commanding of military figures. At any rate, Tom burst out laughing.

'Oh, lay off, you two!' His language was a great deal more American now. 'I'm only doing my duties! Now then, to business! The top brass from Los Angeles have cordially invited us to the hospital meeting next Saturday. I have it here in black and white, in an official letter.'

'Really?' I asked in surprise. 'And how exactly does that concern me?'

I should explain here that monthly medical conferences were part of the Kaiser Hospitals' routine functions. On these occasions all the medical staff, heads as well as assistants, from all the neighbouring Kaiser Hospitals met to discuss their work.

Each case treated in these hospitals was reviewed and debated. In particular, that of any patient who had died either following an operation or through illness. These were extremely frank and instructive meetings. The cause of death would be analysed from every possible angle to discover if something more could not have been done in the circumstances. If, perhaps, it was found that the technique applied had been too drastic for the condition of a certain patient, then this would be stated outright—with the sole purpose of preventing the recurrence of a similar mistake.

These discussions are certainly invaluable to those intimately connected with and responsible for the smooth functioning of the Kaiser Hospitals. But they can obviously only concern regular staff, since, for one thing, they take place only once a month.

So where did I fit in? Not only was I there for a single month only, but I had actually reached the end of that term!

To Harry's Aid

Maybe Tom had just wanted to be polite as usual, and as a token of esteem, before I said my actual farewells, he had thought it a nice gesture to invite me. It certainly was a nice gesture, for Sunday, the last day in October, was to be my last day there; so the meeting on Saturday would serve as a friendly little send-off.

I don't mind admitting, and I am sure that no one will be much surprised to hear, that I was very sorry indeed at the thought of severing Harry's and my partnership—still so very much in its infancy. Time, however, had never yet stood still and was unlikely to begin doing so now, just to oblige me! My four weeks were at an end; there was nothing to be done!

I turned towards Tom. 'Look, Tom, there's really no need to ask me—much as I appreciate it! I'm only a guest here and I know well enough that these meetings are for the regulars.'

'My dear George, I'm asking you not only for myself, but because your name happens to be expressly mentioned in the letter. They seem to want your presence there for some reason—ahem—a reason which quite escapes me!' he grinned.

'Well, well, or as you people say, "I'll be doggone"! I'll be most happy to come, of course! You can tell your bosses, Tom, that I'll consider it a privilege.'

It appeared that my parting was to become more and more difficult. I really began to dread the thought! Why, I wondered, did one always have to leave people and places when one was happy and contented.

Later that evening I was given more precise details of the meeting. I learned that a dinner was to follow the official business and the doctors' wives, too, were to be invited to this.

Finishing my last spoonful of apple-pie—so Americanized had we become—I told my wife about my conversation with Tom.

To Harry's Aid

'That really is nice of them, George!'

'Ah yes, but you're not quite left out of all this either, my dear!'

'Me?'

'Yes, Jane! The surgeons' wives are all invited to the dinner after the conference.'

'Mmm, good! Then at least I won't have to be a grass-widow for the evening!' Then a sudden thought struck her. 'George, did you say dinner—are you sure it's for dinner, this time?' Before I could reply, she went on: 'Did you make sure of the time for dinner, darling?' She paused and smiled. 'It isn't just coffee and "cookies", by any chance?'

'Oh, really!' I laughed. 'Once bitten, twice shy,' I added, and to reassure her I took out the invitation from my pocket. 'See for yourself—doesn't it say dinner?'

'Yes, it does say dinner!' she agreed.

Saturday arrived. We had plenty of time to settle our affairs at the motel before the meeting, due to begin at half-past six. We had already informed the proprietors of our departure on the Monday. Sunday I intended to spend in making my farewells to all my various friends. So everything was in perfect order and we could enjoy our last but one evening in California with untroubled minds.

Punctually at six-thirty the meeting commenced. Numerous cases were discussed; suggestions were made for future policies to be adopted. Every doctor present was clearly expected to voice his views frankly. These uninhibited exchanges were greatly valued by the management, so it did not strike me as unusual when I, too, was asked to comment on some of the cases with which I had been directly concerned.

It was only to be expected that in the course of a whole month's work at any hospital, some unfortunate patient would have died. What my colleagues and their directors were eager to discover was how their counterparts in England would have acted in similar circumstances. I could only

To Harry's Aid

assure them that, in my opinion, everything possible had been done, and that I could not imagine that any surgeon could have done better.

These, after all, were the inevitable set-backs in all hospitals where major surgery was performed or serious cases accepted! These were the heart-breaks each and every member of a hospital's staff had to school himself to live with—from the Chief down to the porter. Our consolation lay in the hundreds of happy, cured people who walked out of the hospital perfectly fit, when for the most part they had been carried in ailing and in pain!

Just before the conference came to an end, Tom rose. He announced that there was one more item on the agenda, but, to use his own words—'Since we can all do with a little nourishment right now, I think this particular matter can safely rest until after dinner!' We all applauded this point of view heartily. If I was aware that once or twice his eyes were on my face while he spoke, I took this as a sign of camaraderie and attached no further thought to it.

Shortly after eight we all took our seats at the long, beautifully-laid tables, with our wives beside us. This time, Jane and I were not to suffer any disappointment! This was a dinner in the true Californian fashion, after which any normal stomach should be in a very contented state.

When coffee was at last served, it was nearly ten o'clock. Once more it was Tom who rose to bid for our attention.

'Ladies and gentlemen!' he began. 'Now that we have all fortified ourselves somewhat, I think it is quite safe to return to that last item on the agenda of which I spoke earlier.'

'Hear, hear,' shouted his audience with spirit.

'The item in question concerns one man in our midst in particular, but all of us in general. The man is our new, yet already well-proved friend—George Sava!' Harry and Dick, especially, clapped wildly, while Tom's eyes rested again on mine. I myself was in high spirits.

To Harry's Aid

'So now, Tom, you're actually going to make a public announcement about your happiness at seeing the back of me!' I grumbled indignantly. 'And here was I, thinking all this time that we were friends!'

This appeared to amuse the others no end. When the general mirth had subsided, Tom continued unperturbed as ever:

'Dr. Sava,' he addressed me directly, 'it gives me the greatest pleasure to be able to tell you that the management in Los Angeles has asked me to offer you a permanent contract as a senior surgeon!' A veritable roar of applause greeted these words. Waiting for this to die down, Tom then resumed: 'The only drawback to these glad tidings, at least for us here, is that our dear friend would not be working with us in Fontana. For it appears that they need him urgently at the Los Angeles Hospital!'

What was happening to me, meanwhile, while my future was being so openly discussed? I sat there quite dazed. This was just about the last thing I had expected. I knew only that I had done my best and that my three colleagues had frequently expressed their satisfaction with my work. Yet that I should be offered the position of senior surgeon at the main hospital—by far the most important in the Kaiser chain—was quite beyond my hopes or wildest fancies. Even if I had had the wish to remain in California and work for the Kaiser Hospitals, how could I expect to be appointed a senior surgeon after such a brief trial? It was wonderful!

I glanced at my wife. In her face I read pride and pleasure at the honour shown me, but nothing more. I sensed—no—knew, without a single word, that she, too, had not changed her mind about our initial plans. This had been a holiday—slightly protracted—but nevertheless a holiday. We intended to go to London first and eventually return to Rome. Only the day before, I had written to Rome, saying they could now safely expect me there at the beginning of November.

To Harry's Aid

I looked once more at my wife, just to ascertain that I had read her face correctly. Yes, I knew her well after all; there was no mistaking that expression—she had not changed her mind and neither, fortunately, had I!

Now I rose slowly, a little hesitantly. Never in my life did I find it more difficult to utter a few words such as I now spoke in a matter of seconds! Never had I known such difficulty in refusing a generous offer and in declining an honour many a better surgeon might have welcomed without reservations. But I could not do otherwise than refuse. I like to believe that my friends, at any rate, understood the reasons for my decision.

I felt acute embarrassment when I bade farewell to all the company in the large hall; it was an uncomfortable moment! My wife and I drove home in complete silence. There was unmistakable sadness in the air.

On the next day, Sunday, our last day in Fontana, we paid our visits and bade our friends a reluctant goodbye.

All three of us were in subdued, depressed mood. My wife was sorry to part from the easy, informal life she had grown to love so much in California. Gregory could not bear the thought of parting from Debby any more than from his beloved lizards. The former he hugged and kissed repeatedly; leaving off only to stroke and blow kisses tenderly to the latter. He really was heart-broken, poor little chap!

My own sadness I could not analyse quite so readily. It left me puzzled and bewildered. Once again, just when destiny had proved herself generous and open-handed, I had chosen to turn my back on her. This, however, I knew to be the pattern of my life; this was me! A 'me', moreover, I have not even now begun to comprehend. . . .

En Route to Rome

It was a superb morning—late autumn in California. Its tender, ripe, exquisite beauty influenced one's every move, brightened one's mood, transformed even the plainest face or place. Translucent, clear blue skies; soothing, alluring warmth, but no longer searing heat. All this enticement from nature, together with the tempting offer from Kaiser—it was almost too much! All the same, we struggled bravely, still determined to resist and to remain faithful to our intentions.

After a lengthy discussion the previous night as to the best and most attractive route to follow on our trail back to England, we had at least come to the conclusion that, whichever our route, we would take it at our leisure.

'We may never visit America again,' my wife had warned me. 'And so far I've seen very little of it.'

'It's true, we must make the most of this opportunity! I may have seen a little more than you have, but not enough, by far!'

Then my wife gave voice to one of her numerous bright ideas. 'George,' she almost chanted, and I could instantly tell by her voice that this was a brain-wave coming up! 'George, d'you think our old Cadillac would have the strength and energy to convey us right across the States?'

En Route to Rome

These last few weeks Jane had entirely altered her appraisal of my Cadillac and had even developed a certain sentimental affection for it. By now we both thought of it as an old and trusted friend. Jane had dubbed it 'Old Faithful', which had instantly turned the car from an inanimate object into a live member of the *Sava ménage*.

As my wife well knew, nothing takes my fancy more than an unexpected, challenging proposition. I like to meet challenges and see them carried to their successful conclusion! Besides, here my imagination, too, began to scintillate! New vistas of wonderful sights and journeys opened up before me, almost before she had finished speaking.

'I think Old Faithful could make it; besides, I happen to like the idea, so she'd better!' In my fervour I rushed on: 'We'll just dump the luggage in the back and the three of us can relax and drive to wherever the fancy takes us!' Then I scratched my forehead for an unpleasant moment.

'Oh—London and Rome will just have to wait and do without us for another week, eh?'

'Done!' exclaimed my wife happily, thereby clinching the deal.

It was in this way that our drive through Los Angeles became more like a canter than a car-ride. Los Angeles was fascinating and there was no reason why we should not enjoy its charms unhurriedly for the last time. I left it to Jane to compose a provisional list of places she particularly wished to see. It was also her job to furnish us with the necessary provisions for longer drives and picnics on the way. The only thing we asked of the youngest member of the party was that he should try to be as reasonable as he possibly could during the journey. Seasoned traveller that he already was, he assured us that he would be as good as gold. What more could we ask?

For my part, I took over the mechanical side. We may have been fond of 'Old Faithful', but that did not blind us

En Route to Rome

to her shortcomings. A journey of three thousand five hundred miles would be quite a feat even for a car of less mature years, so I wanted the old girl got into condition and given a new lease of life.

I drove, therefore, to my dealer friend who had originally sold me 'Old Faithful'. I felt that I would like to say goodbye and I also considered him the most suitable surgeon for giving her a thorough overhaul.

'Some journey you've set your mind on there, Doc! You'll want a couple o' new tyres, as well as some new plugs,' he told me, bending down to examine his patient conscientiously.

'I leave it to you,' I said. 'How long d'you think it will take?'

'Aw, I'd say a couple o' hours should do it!'

'Fine!'

'We've time to go and see Leo Harris—I'd like to,' I suggested to my wife. Therefore, at about eleven that morning, we found ourselves seated in comfortable chairs in my agent's office. For a little while we discussed our forthcoming trek across America. Then, as I thanked him for the umpteenth time and was about to rise and take my leave, he asked: 'Why didn't you accept the offer from Kaiser's, by the way, Dr. Sava?'

'So you know about that too?' I smiled.

'Sure!' he admitted. 'Why wouldn't I? After all, you did me out of a nice little commission there!'

'Oh, Harris, I really am sorry about that!'

'No, seriously though—a job like that doesn't grow on trees, y'know!'

Pensively, I had to agree. 'I do know. But remember, Leo, this was supposed to be my vacation and even if it did turn out to be a busman's holiday—now we're going home!'

'Sure, sure, I do understand!' He nodded several times as if in proof. 'But—ahem—what's to stop you taking another little temporary job—say, for a couple of weeks or so?'

En Route to Rome

I looked up at him startled.

'Well, you're a free man, ain't you?' he defended himself.

'Free as a bird!' I had to agree laughingly. 'But Kaiser wanted me to sign a permanent contract—I thought you knew.'

'I wasn't thinking of Kaiser's; sure I knew they wanted a permanent surgeon. . . . Nope, not them! But there's another pal of mine who needs help pretty badly.'

'Don't tell me another surgeon's been taken ill!' I teased.

'No. This pal of mine's the owner of a small hospital in the suburbs and the poor bloke is terribly short of staff—particularly of a good surgeon!'

A little bell began to chime! 'But surely he needs a permanent man?'

'In the long run, sure! Right now, he'd be glad of a surgeon for even a few days—he just hasn't got one at all!' He paused, allowing just sufficient time for the 'dime' to drop, unaware that it had long since done so.

'Well, how about it, Sava?' Friend Harris had begun the onslaught.

'No, Leo, this time it really isn't possible. Maybe there will come a time—one never knows.' And I repeated, chiefly, I think, for my own benefit: 'Not this time, Leo!'

'Ah well, no harm in trying, eh?' Then he remembered to ask quite suddenly: 'By the way, where did you say you were heading for first?'

'San Francisco,' my wife, who had all this time kept an ominous silence, informed him now. 'I have always wanted to see it!' She volunteered eagerly: 'Ever since I saw Spencer Tracy and Clark Gable in that glorious film! Oh, and the famous Golden Gate, of course, I must see that! No, George?'

I nodded, and Harris exclaimed: 'That's just dandy! What a coincidence, it's my home town—a wonderful city!' Then he turned to me.

'Listen, Dr. Sava. I'm going to ask you to do me a little favour! You're bound to pass my friend's hospital—you

En Route to Rome

know, the one I just told you about! Could you, d'you think, just give him a message from me?'

'Of course, with pleasure!' How could I refuse Harris a small service, when he had been so helpful?

'Gee, thanks! Just tell him that I'm doing my darndest to get him someone and give him my best regards.'

'Yes, I'll do that for you. Jot the address down for me, will you?'

He handed me a slip of paper, on which the address was already written, and with his profuse good wishes still ringing in our ears, we left his office.

We still had one hour to kill before the car would be ready. Gregory, by this time, bored with the constant company of adults and their uninteresting talk, had grown rather restless and claimed to be 'starving'. So we lunched in town and allowed Gregory to choose a toy from the tempting array staring out at him from the window of a store. At three o'clock we were at last all set. 'Old Faithful' seemed as good as new after all the surgery she had undergone and we commenced our somewhat indirect return—to Rome!

We drove through Beverly Hills, Santa Monica and then took the coastal road to the north. This is a particularly enchanting part of California. Quite enraptured, we thought it would be nice to drive to Santa Barbara for dinner and spend the night at Carmel—one of the most beautiful spots in the whole of California. We had heard a great deal about it and were both set on seeing it for ourselves.

In little more than an hour we found the hospital Mr. Harris had asked me to call at. All at once it dawned on me that some years previously I had passed through this very district—only now it was changed almost beyond recognition! Where formerly there had been nothing but fields and open stretches of country, now suddenly whole towns had sprung up. It was for one of these new developments that the hospital catered.

En Route to Rome

In the brand new, modern shopping centre, we were directed to the hospital and were told that it lay on the edge of the town.

It did not take us more than a few minutes, therefore, to reach our destination. The hospital itself was small but well-appointed, cheerful, and, of course, extremely modern. From what I could gather at first glance, it appeared to be an establishment of about eighty beds; compact and well-equipped. Comparison with the enormous, almost awe-inspiring Kaiser Hospital at Los Angeles would, however, have been ridiculous!

'Well, George,' remarked my wife, 'that would have been some come-down for you after the Kaiser Hospital!'

'Mmm,' I agreed. 'But for a short while, a little place like this might not have been so bad—certainly restful!' And I reminded her: 'You mustn't forget, Jane, much good work has been done in even smaller hospitals! All it depends on is the quality of the staff—the surgeon in particular!'

'Naturally!' said my wife.

At the desk in the attractive entrance hall, I handed my card to the friendly, trim receptionist. In no time at all a broadly-smiling young man came towards us.

'I'm Pat Hurley,' he introduced himself. 'Business manager of Merryville—that's our hospital!'

'I'm pleased to meet you, Mr. Hurley,' said I, while my wife threw him a pleasant smile.

'Mr. Harris told us that you'd be coming to look us up.'

'I must say, Harris is certainly efficient!' I added: 'Actually, I promised him to have a word with the owner—a Dr. Meyer, I believe. Could I see him for a few minutes, Mr. Hurley?'

'Sure thing, Dr. Sava! He's just this minute been on the phone to say he'd be over right away!'

I glanced at my watch. 'Oh, I see—I really don't think I can wait—we just can't spare the time! You see, we'd

En Route to Rome

like to make Santa Barbara before night-fall. I'm sure Dr. Meyer will understand.'

'Why,' he grinned, 'you'll make it with time to spare, Doctor, never you worry!' The attractive lilt of his Irish brogue made listening to him a pleasure. 'We have dinner here at half after five!' Now he too consulted his watch. 'It's nearly five now, anyway! You've got to have a meal somewhere, before you start off—at least, I'm sure buster here will have something to say if he doesn't get some nourishment!' With his infectious, boyish grin, he ruffled Gregory's curls playfully.

'Since you put it like that, Mr. Hurley, I must admit you've got a point!'

'And three dinner guests?' Hurley stated more than inquired. I nodded in agreement and Jane shrugged her shoulders slightly and looked resigned.

Pat Hurley now offered to show us round the hospital, and hospitals being in my blood, how could I refuse? He introduced us to two of the doctors as we walked along the corridor and then we were shown two of the operating theatres, which impressed me with their excellent equipment and spotless cleanliness. We were chatting with the technician when Dr. and Mrs. Meyer at last arrived.

The doctor was a man of about forty-five, with a tall, athletic figure and a weather-beaten, handsome face. His deep sun-tan betrayed his predilection for outdoor life—probably some sport like sailing, I thought, the sea being almost within walking distance.

His wife was tall, slender and also most attractive. If I was any judge these two were a devoted couple.

'I'm so glad to make your acquaintance, Dr. Sava!' David Meyer almost crushed my fingers between his. 'This is my wife, Katie.'

'Delighted,' said I, as I shook hands with the delectable Katie. 'May I introduce my wife, Jane—and oh, I almost

En Route to Rome

forgot——' I looked round in search of my youngest offspring. But Sava junior was fully occupied in conversation with his new pal Pat, who was just feeding him on cookies and Coke. 'That little greedy scamp over there is Gregory Sava!'

Mrs. Meyer went over to Gregory, who hastily put down his empty Coke bottle and swallowed his last mouthful with an audible gulp. 'Hello, Gregory, you must come and meet my four children some time,' she told him. 'We have two boys and two girls—you'd like to meet them, wouldn't you, Gregory?'

Our Gregory, however, was quite content with his present playmate, for he seemed to have taken an immediate fancy to Pat Hurley. 'Yes,' he said, very half-heartedly, but none the less politely.

'You'll have lots of fun together, I'm sure,' coaxed the charming Mrs. Meyer. He waited silently until he judged she had finished with him; then instantly he was at Pat's side once more.

'Have you seen our hospital?' asked Dr. Meyer.

'Yes, it's a fine place!' I replied.

'It looks far smaller from the outside than it actually is,' remarked my wife, 'and goodness, isn't it modern!'

'Thank you, I'm so pleased that you think so, and I'm particularly glad, Dr. Sava, that you like the look of the place. Let's all have a cocktail in my office, then, and you can tell me how Leo Harris is getting on!'

Sipping our cocktail a few minutes before we were to go into the dining-room, we could hear the all-too-familiar wail of an ambulance. As soon as the siren had died down, one of the staff came to call Dr. Meyer. His wife, meanwhile, tried hard to appear unconcerned and keep up the flow of conversation. Yet it was easy enough to see that she was worried.

Dr. Meyer returned a few minutes later, his tan more yellow than golden now, his expression decidedly anxious.

En Route to Rome

'Excuse me, won't you,' he apologized to us. 'But—well, you know yourself, don't you, Dr. Sava?' Without further explanation, throwing me only a tired smile, he turned to Pat.

'Please, Pat, get through to Los Angeles and try to locate Dr. Rowe—it's urgent!'

The name he had just mentioned seemed familiar to me. 'Is that Dr. Rowe, the plastic surgeon?' I asked in spite of myself.

'Yes, it is! Why, do you know him?'

'Yes, I know him quite well—he is a very good surgeon.' For some unknown reason, I then wanted to know: 'Is there no plastic surgeon on your own staff?'

With sad resignation Meyer told me: 'Not only no plastic surgeon, Dr. Sava—I just haven't a single specialist surgeon of any description on my resident staff at present! That's why we have to call Los Angeles when we need one!'

'Dear me!' I exclaimed. 'That's quite a predicament for a hospital to be in!'

'I don't mind telling you,' Dr. Meyer almost groaned, 'it's absolute hell!'

'What on earth do you do when you get an urgent internal injury case or a gastric perforation?' I could not refrain from asking; the hopelessness of his position, the unfeigned misery on his face, getting the better of me.

'We did have a first-class resident surgeon, but since he left, we simply haven't been able to fill his position satisfactorily! Of course, we do have our consultants to call on in such emergencies.'

Nothing more was said on the subject. For the next half-hour Pat Hurley was constantly, frantically dialling numbers and speaking to various people in Los Angeles. From what I was able to gather, Dr. Rowe was nowhere to be found. Several other surgeons whom he was able to locate were unable to come immediately.

En Route to Rome

I began to feel uncomfortable, my conscience distinctly guilty. 'What exactly is the trouble, Dr. Meyer?' I had to ask, as he came rushing in, for at least the fifth time, with his desperate 'well?' directed at Pat.

'This is a tragic case, Sava. A terrible automobile accident! The ambulance has just brought an entire family—father, mother and their two children; but it's the little girl I'm chiefly worried about!'

'Is she very badly hurt, then?'

'God, yes! The poor child's face is in a ghastly state—cut to ribbons!'

I must have winced perceptibly. If I hated one thing above all, it was seeing children hurt through careless accidents. 'Would you like me to take a look at her?'

His eyes replied before he had even uttered a word. 'Yes, I'd like you to, very much,' he said simply.

In the Emergency Ward lay four figures. On closer scrutiny, as I walked up to each bed, I was able to identify them. First, a man of about thirty, whom I took to be the father. He did not appear to be too badly injured; the minor cuts on his arms and legs were already being attended to by one of the doctors.

In the next bed lay the wife, whom the other resident doctor was preparing for X-ray examinations. He explained to us that he suspected fracture of one of the legs.

Now I came to a little girl of about seven, and what I saw was heart-breaking! As I looked down at her she lay completely still and rigid. Obviously she had been given drugs to relieve both pain and shock. I bent over her to inspect her face more closely. No, Dr. Meyer had not exaggerated—it was a horrifying sight! Both her cheeks, as well as her lips, were quite literally cut to shreds.

A deep gash ran from one corner of the mouth, over the nose, almost to the edge of the eye. It looked as if she had been cruelly slashed with an object like a carving-knife!

En Route to Rome

What had actually caused these savage lacerations, no doubt, was a piece of glass from her father's car. It was only by a sheer stroke of fortune that her eyes, as it appeared, were left unharmed.

Something stirred within me. This child, this grossly disfigured little girl—she was of just about the same age as my own youngest daughter! What, dear God, if this had happened to her? What if there had been no one to give her immediate assistance?

As I straightened from the bed, wiping the perspiration from my forehead, Pat rushed up to us.

'It's hopeless, just hopeless! I just had a message from Dr. Rowe—he cannot get here before seven at the earliest—he's operating!'

'What about the Beach Hospital?' asked Dr. Meyer in a hoarse voice. 'Try to locate Dr. Smith!'

'I've already tried there. He can't come till late this evening! Jesus, Jesus!' The young Irishman cried, as he looked at the pitiful figure of the child.

'Dr. Meyer!' I spoke at last. 'Would you like me to operate?' In truth, my mind had been made up from the moment I had set eyes on the poor child!

Once again Dr. Meyer's eyes said a great deal more than their owner was able at the time to express in speech; he merely nodded: 'Yes, Dr. Sava—I'll assist you!'

So I spent the next two hours in the operating theatre of that little hospital. With extreme care I cleansed the wounds, cut away the dead portion of the skin and muscles and then set about reconstructing the whole face of the child—as well as I knew how!

Very, very gradually, from that horrible mass of mangled tissue, there emerged a normal child's face.

We left the theatre in complete silence, while the girl was wheeled into one of the wards. Shortly afterwards I took another look at my little patient and wrote the final

En Route to Rome

instructions on the chart above her bed. Then Dr. Meyer and I rejoined our wives.

All of two hours late we now sat down to dinner. Gregory had long since had his, so Pat Hurley kept him amused meanwhile: a task he seemed to have a rare talent for.

During dinner I asked Dr. Meyer if he knew of a hotel where we might spend the night. By then it was far too late to attempt any further travelling; also it was high time my son was in bed.

'The surgeon's apartment is vacant, Dr. Sava. I wouldn't dream of letting you go to a hotel at this time of the night—you'll be quite comfortable there, I'm sure!'

My wife was both relieved and wary. I think she sensed instinctively what was to follow.

For, sure enough, Pat Hurley came into the dining-room, closely trailed by a very weary Master Sava. In Pat's hand was a large, official-looking document.

'Dr. Sava!' he addressed me, his brogue more marked than ever. 'How about putting your name down there?' And he passed me what I now recognized as a contract of some kind. 'Just to make it official, like' he added hastily.

I glanced at him in surprise, my face a blank. 'To make what official, Mr. Hurley?'

'Och, come on now! That you've become our chief surgeon, of course!'

Now, whether I was too spent by this time to argue, or whether the child's lacerated little face preyed on my mind still, I honestly cannot say. All I can relate here is that, believe it or not, I took the form and without so much as a murmur signed my name on the dotted line!

Tired I may have been, yet I found the strength to tell Dr. Meyer: 'One condition I must make, Dr. Meyer! I'll stay until you can find a man to replace me—right now, I just can't leave you in this mess!'

What of my wife? I hardly dared look at her; yet almost

En Route to Rome

as soon as I had spoken, I felt my hand being squeezed. We had our own way of communicating on such occasions and she was telling me, I was certain, that she approved! Only now did I have the courage to meet her eyes.

'But aren't you going to read the contract?' asked David Meyer in utter amazement. He had probably never before encountered such an unbusinesslike transaction.

'Oh, I'm much too tired now—I'll read it later. Anyway, the main thing is, Dr. Meyer, that you really must try to find someone as soon as possible,' I told him. 'I can only help you out for a very short while, since we have already made all our plans.'

That night, seated in the small lounge of the apartment, Gregory fast asleep in his room, I read the contract to my wife.

I was to be the chief surgeon at Merryville Hospital at a salary of two thousand dollars a month. Added to this was fifty per cent of the fees for any operations I might perform on private patients directly sent to me. The other clauses dealt with the usual insurance, sick-leave and social security.

Casting the large form aside with an enormous yawn, I rose, rubbed my eyes and said to Jane:

'Let's go to bed, darling! I'm dog-tired, I don't mind telling you. And I would like to be fresh in the morning, for my latest employment.' As Jane nodded and rose, another thought struck me.

'You know, Jane, it looks to me as if there's going to be quite a lot to do in that little place!'

An Old Man's Story



It was not to take me long—I was becoming well-seasoned—to settle down in my new position as chief and only surgeon. A few days were more than sufficient, these days, for me to acclimatize myself. Granted, here I was a big fish in a minute pond, but at least I could do anything I thought fit, on my own and without having to consult or take orders from anyone.

Right from the first day Dave Meyer had told me: 'Remember, George, you are the surgical boss of this hospital—I place all my confidence in you, so don't worry!'

'Thank you, Dave,' said I. 'But as far as I'm concerned, you're the boss!'

'I'm only the owner,' he laughed. 'I foot the bills, George; but let's face it, I'm a physician, not a surgeon. Any decision regarding surgery is entirely yours to make.'

'All I can do, in that case,' I replied, 'is to ensure that your faith in me is justified!'

It was in this way that our professional partnership began. Yes, I was certainly singularly lucky with the colleagues I had to work with in California. Fortune had been with me from the outset, beginning with my friends at the Kaiser Hospital, and once fortune takes a hold, it happily refuses to be shaken off lightly—the one thing she has in common with

An Old Man's Story

her ugly sister, adversity. Never once were Dave and I to exchange an angry word over any matter concerning the hospital or its organization. Never once was my decision concerning an operation questioned, let alone refuted!

This, in itself, was a great encouragement: an incentive for me to do my utmost at all times. It brought out the best in me, egged me on to do even more than I was perhaps expected to do! For here was a man placing all his trust in me. I owed it to him, surely, to repay this trust. It also gave me a deep sense of satisfaction to feel that I was being a help both to him and to the hospital.

One word here, in an effort to give my reader some idea of my new colleague's abilities. When he had told me that he was only a general physician and not a surgeon, he was being modest; maybe what he should have said was that he had not specifically specialized in surgery. For I was to find that Dave had a definite knack for surgery when the need arose and had evidently had not a little practice.

In his small hospital he had most likely assisted innumerable times and had thus, with his innate dexterity, become more than a little skilled. I noticed that he had a particular leaning to orthopaedics. As for anaesthesia, no abler man ever put a patient of mine to sleep!

To be perfectly truthful and fair, my two other anaesthetists, ladies at that, were also first-rate! Admittedly, until I came to Merryville, my opinion of female anaesthetists had been none too flattering. Yet these two were gradually to make me realize that one must never generalize.

On the social and personal side, Dave and Katie Meyer did their best to make the rest of my family as comfortable and contented as possible. With Mrs. Meyer's assistance we soon found a small, wholly delightful furnished apartment—swimming pool and all! The latter was the answer to my wife's and son's prayers, particularly my son's. Gregory soon became an absolute water addict and I believe he would

An Old Man's Story

have been more than happy to take up permanent residence in it! Calling him in for meals, not to speak of bed, became a major operation for my wife. He soon became a fair hand at the dog-paddle, and Jane was quite horrified when one day he surreptitiously discarded his safety-belt and nonchalantly swam the entire length of the pool without it! It must not be forgotten that only a few weeks before he had hardly been able to swim at all, so my wife's shock was understandable. Fortunately, apart from occasional mouthfuls of water, nothing more serious occurred and my wife's fears were soon allayed.

For my own part, I was becoming familiar with the routine at Merryville. Around eight in the morning my rounds began, these taking me about an hour. During that time I visited each patient and gave instructions for further treatment. At nine o'clock I would commence to operate—usually until one o'clock.

The two resident doctors alternated in assisting me, though not infrequently Dave himself gave a hand. Generally at that time of the morning, while I was operating, the accident department was at its busiest, being attended by the doctor not engaged in assisting me.

All too soon, I awoke to the fact that the size of the little hospital bore no relation whatever to the size of its mission. Its modest dimensions very much belied the importance of its position and the amount of work carried out there. Dr. Meyer had made an arrangement with the town council to the effect that all accidents occurring within a radius of ten miles were automatically to be referred to Merryville Hospital. If one stops to consider that four of the main highways ran through that specified radius, it is easy enough to imagine the amount of work this would involve in accidents alone. Apart from that, of course, Dr. Meyer had quite a number of other patients. So there was never a shortage of work—the only shortage that caused the owner any headaches was that

An Old Man's Story

of sufficient surgical staff—staff living in at the hospital and trained to handle such exacting work!

On top of road accidents, there were the industrial accidents, a number of large factories having been erected in the vicinity. As well as these, one was never for long allowed to forget the more commonplace home accidents, forever relentlessly plaguing the very young and the very aged! So it was hardly surprising if, at times, we had as many as seventy or eighty cases, in no more than twenty-four hours.

Happily, the majority of these were slight accidents. Yet when a major disaster did occur—it was sheer hell!

Both my position at Merryville and the exacting, varied duties that were mine, suited me as if they had been expressly fashioned for George Sava!

'Blessed be Tom, Dick and Harry!' said I to myself over and over again. Without their expert help in brushing up my general surgery, I felt sure I could hardly have coped now with all the immense variety of cases.

With the exception of eye-surgery—certainly quite out of my domain—no other branch was, or indeed could afford to be, neglected! Not only did I become the chief surgeon of the thoracic, abdominal and traumatic departments, but on occasion was to become the obstetrician and gynaecologist also, when the official ones were otherwise engaged.

'Jack of all trades' may be a somewhat disparaging term, but in this instance I was proud to consider myself just that. By nature, as probably has become evident to everyone by now, I am very partial to variety. As I have so often stressed, any one branch of surgery, if performed to the exclusion of all others for a lengthy period, leaves me mentally drowsy and dissatisfied. There is a tendency to become somewhat bored. I must be given variety really to be at my best—and Merryville certainly supplied me with just that!

Any one week would bring its quota of appendix and hernia cases and one or two gall-bladders and gastric ulcers.

An Old Man's Story

Fractures and lacerations found their way to me by way of the emergency department.

Should this, by any chance, still not suffice, the gynaecological department would come to my rescue soon enough! They could always supply me with a cyst or two, on top of the odd hysterectomy. To put the finishing touch to the week's unpredictable tasks: of a Sunday night, my help might be required for a more joyful occasion. By means of a caesarian section, another life-loving Californian would emerge, roaring lustily, before I could finally turn over the page of that week! Whatever else, certainly there was never a dull moment!

From the first week, this had become my course of duty at Merryville and I was not to digress from the pattern until the last day of my stay there. On my first Thursday it was Harry I blessed for the ten days' refresher course in orthopaedic surgery I had received at his hands. The reason for my silent blessing was a very old, ailing and unwanted man. He must have been all of eighty years old and was definitely very much on the decline.

Living quite alone, with only occasional help from a woman relative, he was, not surprisingly, in an unkempt, sorely neglected state. It appeared that his feet had been badly swollen for weeks on end, his appetite completely gone, and he had suffered from fits of coughing and breathing difficulties.

It would have been apparent to any doctor that this old man was afflicted with gradual heart failure. Since no doctor had been called, however, the poor man had carried on as best he could.

On the Thursday morning he had tried to cook breakfast for himself as usual, had slipped on the kitchen tiles and had fallen heavily on his back. The result, a broken hip—the common tragedy befalling most old people after similar accidents. For two hours this forsaken man lay groaning

An Old Man's Story

on the floor. Then, happily, the relative arrived, cast one look at him and phoned for an ambulance.

When I examined him at the hospital he was obviously a dying man. A hip fracture on top of advanced heart failure could not be anything but a calamity in a man of over eighty. I shall never cease to be amazed at the quirks of the human body and it was surprising that this old man should still be alive at all!

Attending to the fracture just then was out of the question. All we could do was to put him to bed, ease his pain and make him as comfortable as possible. The woman who had accompanied him to the hospital, who was herself very shaken, told us that he had a son who lived a hundred and fifty miles away. We therefore sent a telegram informing him of his father's grave condition.

For the old man's sake, I only hoped he would live long enough to see his son once more. Naturally we did not neglect his general condition. Even if we were unable to mend the fracture for the moment, at least we could attend to his heart ailment.

This is where Dave Meyer came into his own and proved his ability as a physician. He took charge of the old man and instituted the general routine treatment for heart failure. He bestowed such intense care on his patient and looked after him with such touching conscientiousness that one could not fail to be at least a little heartened at the humanity of this man of medicine. And his pains were to be rewarded! For—miracle of miracles—the old man not only lived to see his son the next day, but actually began to respond to treatment and visibly improve.

Gradually his breathing became lighter, more regular; the swelling of his legs began to subside, though in slow stages. No matter, the reaction on the whole was vastly encouraging, particularly when no real reaction at all had been expected! We intensified the treatment; all of us taking a particular interest in this man who dared to defy death itself.

An Old Man's Story

Standing over him, Dave at my side, I conjectured: 'Perhaps, Dave, perhaps we'll be able to improve his general condition to such an extent that we could even risk the operation after all?'

Dave nodded. 'That's exactly what I am hoping for!'

For another ten days we combined our various talents and experience to try all conceivable means of saving our old friend now that he had stayed with us this long! I believe we all felt an affection for him, though at this stage he was still something of a stranger to us. Yet the mere fact that he should so fervently 'hang on' was a challenge, and since he had taken it up we could not but fight alongside him.

So the fight for his life continued, and it was not to be in vain. He really did improve greatly. He became more alert mentally; more like the person he had obviously been before the illness had set in. Then he even started to complain about being unable to move his leg. This was by far the most encouraging sign yet; now I could seriously consider dealing with the hip fracture.

I knew that the only course open was to pin the femoral shaft to the head of it. This is a procedure requiring a considerable amount of skill. Under X-ray guidance one must set the two ends of the fracture into position. Then the muscles of the thigh must be cut and the upper portion of the thigh bone laid bare.

On a particular spot on the bone a hole is bored with a special instrument and a metal pin inserted from the shaft into the femoral head. Several X-rays must then be taken from different angles. This is not just to ascertain whether the fracture is lodged in the correct position, but to verify that the pin is truly in the centre of the two bone fragments and not, as might well happen, outside the head.

If such a mistake should arise—and it is a none too infrequent one—then the guiding pin must be withdrawn and inserted a second time, at a different angle. This would require

An Old Man's Story

further X-rays, until one had made absolutely sure that now the pin was lodged in the only correct position.

Once this has been completed, the rest is simple enough. A very thick metal pin, hollow in the centre, is pushed over the guiding rod and is hammered into position. A final X-ray check should reveal that now the pin is firmly lodged in the centre of the two bones and grips them together.

Only then can the guiding rod be withdrawn and muscles as well as skin-edges sutured. A small dressing, some adhesive tape—and the operation is terminated. As a rule, the patient can expect to begin walking exercises by the second or third day after his operation. All the while he is given antibiotics to prevent any unforeseen infection of the wound.

All this, I presume, sounds easy enough on paper! I knew all that had to be done; I knew the procedure very well. But could I carry out this operation in practice, could I make a success of it?

I had to consult Dr. Meyer. To him I confessed that my orthopaedic experience went back many years, when I had acted as assistant at an orthopaedic hospital. As for recent experience, I could boast of only ten days as Harry's assistant at Fontana.

'Don't you think that in this case it's advisable to call in a specialist from Los Angeles?' I asked in all sincerity.

'Only if you insist, Sava,' Dave replied. 'Otherwise, as I have told you before, I've complete confidence in you! If you do decide to undertake it—remember, I'm with you all the way.'

That night, still undecided, I discussed my problem with Jane. I told her of my misgivings; it must have been quite apparent to her that I was being pulled hither and thither in my own mind. After all, I had already become attached to the old man, so the qualms I felt were even more intense. What if, unwittingly, I allowed myself to be swayed by false

An Old Man's Story

pride? Maybe I would even be endangering his chances of recovery thereby? It was a devilish predicament! Yet if, on the other hand, I could save him and bring about his complete recovery, there was nothing, just then, that I would have liked to do more!

Jane, listening to me patiently for a while, suddenly stated quite coolly: 'You can do it, George!'

'What makes you say that?' I marvelled.

'By the way you talk; I can generally tell; you know that, don't you?'

It appeared that not only Jane but Dr. Meyer, too, was convinced of my ability to deal with the old man's case. Since, for once, my confidence did require a fillip, this helped at length to decide me. I had to operate—what was more, I had to succeed!

Strictly, almost pedantically, I adhered to Harry's method. Everything seemed to be on the patient's and my side—not the slightest hitch; I was able to progress step by normal step. The guiding rod even, when inserted, was lodged in the correct position first time! Encouraged immensely by this first small triumph and with my assurance growing steadily, I selected a pin of the exact length required; boldly, I hammered this into position.

Final control, X-rays, the stitching of the wound! I mopped my perspiring brow at last; beads of sweat had trickled from it throughout the operation. Then I stood in silence for a long moment. It had been a harassing, almost frightening experience for me. Seldom, if ever, had I been so uncertain about the undertaking of an operation—seldom so worried about its outcome. Yet as I stood there I knew, or rather sensed, that my work had been satisfactory, that my old friend's chances of survival had not been reduced by me!

In the evening I came into the hospital dining-room as usual. I was in the habit of taking dinner with the other doctors, enjoying the informal atmosphere at these meals.

An Old Man's Story

This, too, was our daily opportunity for discussing hospital as well as personal matters at leisure—my opportunity, in particular, for getting to know these new comrades from a human angle.

Soon enough, the talk was of the hip operation. Nothing I could say would convince any of them that this had indeed been my very first independent hip fracture case. I was far too pleased with their persistent disbelief, for one thing, and too fatigued, for another, to attempt any further reasoning.

‘You know,’ laughed Dave, ‘you Britishers really are a funny lot!’

‘We are?’

‘Sure, you’re all so darned modest!’

Another time, I might have laughed a great deal more uproariously than he and for far better reasons! This time, however, I made no comment. As I have said—I was pleased and very, very tired!

Death Takes a Holiday



TO all intents and purposes and by all human standards of reckoning Mary Summers should have been dead! I shall forever fail to understand, therefore, how it came about that she was not. Unless at the time of her accident death had suddenly, on a lively impulse, decided on a little holiday. A short trip, maybe—a respite from its seasonless harvesting. Perhaps, then, just as its scythe had loomed over Mary Summers, death had downed tools and refused, for the moment, to harvest any more.

‘Doctor Sava,’ said the traffic-patrolman who had accompanied the ambulance. ‘This time, I’m afraid, we’re bringin’ a corpse!’

As he became aware of my perplexed expression, he added hastily: ‘I’m sorry, Doc! Sure, very sorry.’

‘But why to us, man—why not straight to the mortuary?’ I asked.

‘They have to be certified as “stiffs” before a post-mortem can be made. Besides, we’re—we’re not all that sure that she, well, that she is all that dead! Are we, Bob?’ And he turned to his mate, the ambulance driver, for support.

‘All right, officer, don’t worry!’ I could not hide a faint smile at his ingenious choice of expression. ‘Just bring her into the emergency room and I’ll—I’ll find out for you how dead she really is!’

Death Takes a Holiday

I stood aside on the corridor while the two men carried the stretcher on which lay a lifeless bundle of humanity. At first glance the woman undoubtedly appeared to be dead. Lifeless, half-opened eyes, hair sticky with blood; one arm drooping limply over the side of the stretcher, as if it did not belong to her body. Not a sound or sign of breathing.

The officer, who still could not tear himself away from the gruesome sight, shook his head several times, in grim disbelief, then his boyish eyes caught mine.

'Lord Almighty!' I exclaimed. 'It does look as if you were right! Just how in heaven's name did this happen?'

He swallowed hard. 'Aw—y'know these looney dames——' His effort at unconcerned cynicism was ill-suited to the shocked, almost frightened expression in his eyes. 'Drivin' at a hundred per hour; they're jus' beggin' for trouble! Bust tyre and off she goes over the rails!'

'It can bring terrible tragedy, careless driving!' I said, bending over the motionless figure. 'You know, it frightens me too—every time I see a thing like this.'

'I'd better leave you to it, then, doctor.'

'Yes, officer. You go into the waiting-room and have a coffee. I'll let you know my findings as soon as I can.'

I had now been at Merryville for three weeks and never yet had a day passed without my being faced with some form of road accident. The effect on me was such that, for the first time in my entire driving career, I really began to fear the roads! The most apt words could never have convinced me half so poignantly or half so forcefully of the folly—or rather the crime—of reckless driving. Confronted daily with its victims, even if I did not immediately throw my car keys out of the window, at least I was learning a lesson I would remember with a nauseating, bitter taste for the rest of my days!

I resolved never again to take risks or to drive negligently, as admittedly I had done on more than one occasion. A tragic aspect of all this is the fact that somehow one never

Death Takes a Holiday

connects oneself, even in the slightest, with such savage disasters—they happen only to others! It is only when those others are lying before you, lifeless and disfigured beyond all recognition, that the stark possibility suddenly becomes a reality: 'This could be you!' It is only then that it is brought home to you how brazenly you brush against death yourself each day of your life!

Very often now, when my wife chanced to be home late and had taken the car, I grew uncomfortably hot under the collar. Not long after our arrival at Merryville, I had made her promise me faithfully never to exceed a speed of sixty-five and always, in all circumstances, to keep a clear car's distance from the other automobiles. In return, I gave her the same promise.

This rule we really tried to observe, reminded daily as we were of the gravity of ignoring it! I can gratefully acknowledge, moreover, that it was thanks to this same rule that I have been able several times to evade an accident by the skin of my teeth.

Today's disaster, however, was the ugliest I had so far had to witness! As I followed the sorry little procession into the emergency room, I was joined by Dave Meyer and his senior resident house-man, Frederick Storm.

'Well, Dr. Sava,' said Dr. Storm, turning to me. 'I don't think you'll be wanting my help with this poor creature!'

'It does look that way, Storm, but—you never can tell! Just hang on another minute, will you? Let's carry out the examination first!'

I borrowed Dr. Meyer's stethoscope and asked the nurse to unbutton the woman's blouse. With the stethoscope placed over her chest and my ear glued to the instrument, I listened, without much hope, for a few seconds.

As I handed the stethoscope to Dave, the only remark I passed was: 'Here, Dave, listen, will you?' I deliberately withheld from him the reason for wanting his opinion. For it had seemed to me that I could discern the faintest of heartbeats!

Death Takes a Holiday

I thought this impression so illogical at the time that I put it down to my vivid imagination—yet, without influencing Dave, I none the less wanted his verdict. Intently I watched for any change of expression on Dave's face. Was I right—was there a look of alertness—was he listening a second time with renewed interest? Sure enough, he straightened once, then instantly bent over the woman again, to resume his listening.

Again he straightened, and spoke at last. 'You heard it too, didn't you, George?'

'Yes, I did, but it seemed such an impossibility—I just couldn't trust my own ears. At any rate, I wanted you to confirm it!'

Even now, like myself, Dave was unable to credit the sounds of breathing from a woman who, in every other way, had nothing in common with a living human being. He put the stethoscope into Dr. Storm's hand. 'See if you can hear it too, Fred!'

More silence, suspense, baited breath as Storm bent over her! Yet quicker than either of us had done, he confirmed our conjecture with a decisive nod. 'You aren't imagining things—I can definitely hear breathing!'

So Mary Summers really was not yet 'quite dead'! Unwittingly, the patrol officer had come very near the truth, when he had remarked that he wasn't 'really sure that she's all that dead!'

More than likely the shock of the severe internal injuries was responsible for her condition. It was quite clear to all of us present, that although she was not yet dead, the end could not be far off. Unless—unless something very drastic could be done immediately.

We required no discussion or further consultation to agree on our next step. We all knew that if it were humanly possible, we intended to discover this drastic way which would restore Mary Summers to the world of the living, instead of oscillating somewhere between the two worlds, as she was at present.

Death Takes a Holiday

The moments of doubt and indecision were gone and their place was taken by a rush of orders and bustling activity. An oxygen cylinder was rushed in and its mouth-piece connected to the patient. Heart stimulants were directly injected into her veins.

Again those interminable, anxious moments of waiting! Then a very, very timid touch of colour actually began to creep into her hitherto chalk-white cheeks. Now her chest started to heave; at first with shallow, but soon with deeper and more regular rhythm.

As softly and painstakingly as I knew how, I went over her body with my fingers. The list of her injuries—discovered and suspected—began to sound like a text book.

'Multiple lacerations of face, arms and body,' I dictated to Dr. Storm. 'Comminuted fractures of left arm, wrist and fingers. Possible fracture of left leg and left ankle,' I continued. 'Probable severe internal injuries, with internal bleeding.' Turning towards my colleagues for a moment, I said urgently:

'With this last, as you no doubt realize, we must deal instantly—if we are to have any hope of saving this woman!'

'That would be nothing short of a miracle,' muttered Fred Storm to himself.

'It would indeed! But all the same, that's just what we've got to try to bring about—we must try to save this poor woman!'

'Of course, Dr. Sava, but it looks unbelievably hopeless right now!'

'What exactly d'you think her internal injuries are?' Dave Meyer inquired of me, while he felt her abdomen with that wonderfully gentle touch of his.

'Most likely rupture of the spleen,' I hazarded. 'It appears that her injuries are chiefly concentrated on the left side of her body. But I wouldn't by any means exclude injuries to the liver and stomach, especially if the poor woman had a substantial meal before her accident!'

Meyer heard me to the end without saying anything

Death Takes a Holiday

further. This was a case for surgery and with his usual courtesy he waited for me to offer my surgical suggestions. As usual, also, he had not long to wait!

‘Come on, Dave—let’s get her to the theatre!’ I told him determinedly. ‘You will give the anaesthetic, won’t you? There just isn’t the time to wait for the anaesthetist.’

‘Why, of course, George, I’ll be glad to! Let’s get weaving then!’ I felt that Dave had expected me to react in exactly this way and the knowledge strengthened my determination.

Fortunately the technician had just finished verifying the patient’s blood group and I could order several pints of blood. I asked Storm to begin the blood transfusions immediately. At the most, half an hour had elapsed between the time Mary Summers had arrived at the hospital and the time when she lay on the operating table before us. Two pints of blood flowed simultaneously into her right arm and leg. And thus began another of the innumerable tussles between the surgeon and death!

Being uncertain of the exact nature of the internal injury, I decided to open the abdomen with a large, horizontal incision; in this way I would gain access to all the abdominal organs. If, until now, I had harboured some small hope of saving this woman’s life, this hope was now to fail me as I saw the severe havoc contained within the abdomen.

All that confronted us was a deep crimson sea of blood; nothing was distinguishable but this flood of crimson liquid. Very dark blood it was, with ominous, dreaded yellow streaks—bile! To begin with, therefore, we could reckon with damaged liver and gall-bladder.

‘What next?’ I asked myself, as I began carefully to suck the blood away with the electric aspirator. Gradually, with painful slowness, the abdominal cavity was cleared, and one by one the abdominal organs became visible.

On the left-hand side, under the lower ribs, we discovered, instead of the small, pink organ the spleen should have

Death Takes a Holiday

been, a mass of disintegrated tissue! A rupture of the spleen—more of an explosion than a rupture, for that matter! At that moment, I could ill afford to spend more time on detailed inspection of intestines, stomach and kidneys. First and foremost, the spleen and liver had to be dealt with. Moreover, this had to be done with great speed if the bleeding was to be stopped. Luckily, in only a few minutes, we located the stump of the spleen, origin of most of the bleeding. Veins and arteries were ligated and pieces of the spleen removed. This put an end to the bleeding from one source at least; now came the liver!

The gall-bladder, torn beyond repair, had to be removed. The liver was cut in three places as if by a sharp knife. These cuts we cleansed and gently sutured. This procedure succeeded in stifling the bleeding from the second source. 'Let it be the last,' I pleaded silently.

Now I could resume inspection of the remaining organs. Here, at last, we were to meet with considerably more encouragement. For stomach and intestines appeared quite unimpaired. The left kidney, though bruised, did not reveal irreparable damage.

'Thank God for that!' This time I spoke aloud. 'Let's close up the abdomen!' I said to Fred Storm, who was assisting me. 'How are you doing?' I suddenly remembered to ask Dave. Until then, I had been so engrossed in my work that even to enquire how he was faring with his anaesthetic had literally slipped my mind!

'Not too bad—not too bad at all, surprisingly enough, George,' Dave told me. 'She's holding her own!'

Another fifteen minutes and the first part of Mary's resurrection was concluded. It had, in all, taken the best part of two hours. 'Well, Fred, so far so good. Perhaps the age of miracles is not yet past! Hm?'

'For the life of me, I wouldn't have believed it possible that she should still be alive!' He paused and looked me

Death Takes a Holiday

straight in the eye. 'But—even now—do you really believe she'll pull through?'

I met his glance with equal seriousness as I replied: 'I don't know, Fred; how can I tell? We can only do our job, the rest is in God's hands.'

Indeed, it could only have been God's will, which in the end seemed almost to drag Mary Summers back to life and engineered her amazing survival! In cases such as these, where life hangs so precariously in the balance, I always like to imagine that someone very close to the sufferer has prayed with reverence, devotion and humility. To me it seems that only such anguished tears, such love and faith, can truly stir the heart of God, to bring about the real victory.

The patrol-officer, who had sat in the waiting-room all this time, was by now drinking his umpteenth cup of black coffee and puffing great clouds of smoke from his never-ending supply of Camels. With him in the room, when I entered, were several other people. Just then, however, I was far too preoccupied to take much notice of them. 'Would you please come outside for a moment,' I addressed the officer.

He rose instantly, obviously relieved that I had not completely forgotten him; had not the nurse reminded me, in all truth I would have done just that! Anyway, I now took him by the arm and led him along the corridor into the doctors' room.

'If you've got your book ready, I can give you some more particulars of Mary Summers!' This young patrol-officer—a profession which in itself, so I had always imagined, requires a certain amount of courage, or callousness, call it what you will—smiled at me with the gentle, sad smile of a school-master. His wide blue eyes were the eyes of a kind-hearted, sensitive human being; I could not help wondering what had made him choose this far from gentle profession of his.

'I'm ready, Doc, I've been ready for hours,' he subtly rebuked me.

Death Takes a Holiday

'I'm sorry you've had to wait so long, but I couldn't give you all the information until now. She's alive, you know,' I added as an afterthought, suddenly recollecting that this young man thought he would be given details of the death of Mary Summers.

Maybe I should have prepared him, for he was quite stunned, his eyes fairly popping out of his head. 'Alive!' he exclaimed. 'Really alive! Jeez, Doc, if that ain't the most—the most——!'

'Amazing, eh?' I came to the confounded lad's rescue.

'Amazin'—you said it!' Then a thought struck him. 'Doctor, could you please come and tell her hubby and kids the wonnerful news yourself?'

I thought this over for a while. 'Well, son, I'm not so sure, yet, that it is such wonderful news!'

'Gee, Doc!' He nearly jumped at me in his childish enthusiasm. 'It is swell—it's just the greatest news! Cain't you see, they think their Maw is dead, anyway! Now, now there's hope!'

Here was a so-called 'hard-boiled' officer with a genuine affection for people; I don't think, at this point, that I would have been astonished if he had wiped away a tear or two. I, for one, was glad that there were men of sentiment to be found even in the professions where feelings are generally pooh-poohed. 'Of course! You're right, young man! I'll do it straight away!'

When a heart-broken, ashen-faced husband and three terrified, bewildered children stood before me, I found myself making a doubly strong resolve to try to save Mary Summers. If humanly possible, this woman must be spared—it would wipe away the look of anguish on the faces before me.

Not till much later was I to learn exactly how Mary Summers had managed to become the battered wreck she was. She had completely lost control of the car after a tyre had burst and everything had just gone berserk. Three times

Death Takes a Holiday

the car had somersaulted, to end up with a terrible crash by the trunk of a tree. The car itself had to be scrapped for junk—Mary Summers lived! Such are the inscrutable whims of fate.

Not that we did not have more than our fair share in her recovery! Mary stayed at our hospital for three months. Once her internal injuries had been dealt with, X-rays helped to detect all the fractures in her body. We soon discovered she had five fractured ribs—but, incredible as it may sound, the lung itself had remained intact!

In addition, of course, came the fractures we already knew of: in arms, legs, hands and feet. Not a little labour was there for us, if Mary was one day to resume a normal active life as wife and mother. The clearer our path became, the happier became our work. Some of the fractures were fixed with metal plates; the arm was put into plaster of Paris and the leg suspended over the end of an extension apparatus.

So we, as well as Mary Summers herself, fought desperately for her life during the following two months. Sometimes she may have complained—and certainly she had much to complain of; yet this was an unmistakable sign of improvement and of recovery and we were glad to see it! Most of the time, however, Mary's relationship with all of us was one of deep gratitude and intelligent, almost touching endurance. She bore all her tribulations stoically, and undoubtedly the pain and discomfort must at times have been unbearable.

At long last, Mary's ordeal was at an end. Everything was mending, her youth contributing immensely to her final recovery. For Mary Summers was only thirty-five years old and had, until the day of her accident, been an exceptionally healthy, happy wife and mother.

All the more reason to rejoice at her being spared! How tragic, how senseless and futile it would have been, had a woman so much needed and loved been snatched from life at one plundering swoop!

The Man on the Flying Trapeze



Charlie Wilson was not exactly an acrobat, neither was his flying performance part of his job. On the contrary, his was a sedentary employment as a builder-supervisor with one of the most well-known American building contractors.

Charlie could afford a more than moderately nice house with a spacious swimming-pool for his wife and three children. He saw to it that he should have little cause to be ashamed when he was called upon to act as host in his home. For it fell to him to entertain any of the directors who might chance to visit that particular branch of the firm.

His unusual feat on the 'flying trapeze', that was to land him in the emergency ward of Merryville Hospital, was entirely accidental. Certainly, he would hardly have chosen to perform this act of his own free will.

At the time I made Charlie Wilson's acquaintance, I had already been at my new post for two months and had carried out scores of operations there. The wide field of experience there had helped to strengthen my assurance and I was now quite prepared to tackle any case that chanced to come my way.

If ever I found myself wavering momentarily, when confronted by some unfamiliar or even new kind of surgical poser, I had only to walk up to the beds of my two 'best friends'—Mary Summers and the old man whose hip I had

The Man on the Flying Trapeze

pinned! The sight of these two was a tonic to my self-confidence.

Before I proceed with Charlie Wilson's story, however, I had better say just a few passing words about these two pet patients of mine.

'Grandpa', then, had survived his hip operation. His son, wishing to help his father and determined he should never again be left on his own, had come to an arrangement with the hospital. This consisted of nothing less than the hospital's undertaking to care for Grandpa for the rest of his days!

'After all, Doctor,' he had said to me, 'Dad has been so sick—what with his heart an' all—that I just couldn't bear the thought of him living alone again. I'd never forgive myself, don't you see?'

'I do see and I think you're absolutely right!' I had agreed.

'He's so happy here,' the son had continued. 'I wish—oh, I'd be so grateful if you people here would look after him for the few months he's still got left! Oh, it's no good kiddin' myself, Doctor, I know that well enough! Dad's a very old man and he's been mighty sick; thanks to you he's still alive, but I'd be crazy to imagine that he can last much longer! All I want is that he should be happy and comfortable for as long as he has got!'

I could only nod, for, even if a little crudely put, the son's attitude was reasonable and above all fair to his father. How could one blame him for assuming, as indeed we all did, that his aged father had not long to live?

Again I nodded thoughtfully. 'He's no trouble at all here. In fact, I know that I, for one, would definitely hate parting with him; he's become quite an institution at the hospital. And certainly he gets all the care he needs here!'

So Grandpa remained at Merryville, liked by all the staff and spoilt like an only son by not a few of us! Yet if anyone expected him to depart from this world in the immediate future—they were sorely mistaken!

The Man on the Flying Trapeze

No, Grandpa remained at Merryville and did not die; in fact, he improved from week to week and lived happily right through my service at the hospital. He was even amongst those who came to see me off, when the curtain did finally come down on my 'two weeks' holiday'!

Mary Summers, on the other hand, did not stay at Merryville by her own choice. Her mangled, punished body took over three months to mend; but the main thing was that it did mend.

At the risk, once again, of appearing immodest, I think it only fair to state that these two cases would be a credit to any surgeon. To me, at that time, they were the morale booster I sometimes needed. That is why, when we were notified that a man who had somersaulted from a roof-top and had crashed to the ground was about to be delivered to us by ambulance, I accepted the new challenge. In fact, I was confident that I would be able to deal with the case. No matter how serious the injury might turn out to be, it could not possibly be more violent than Mary Summers's had been. On the other hand, his general state of health would certainly be a lot better than old Grandpa's, of that I was equally convinced!

Thus I simply ordered the operating theatre, asking one of the assistants to stand by in readiness to help with whatever form of treatment would be required.

The familiar wail of the ambulance soon announced the patient's arrival. The two doctors and I immediately rushed out, heading for the emergency room. We arrived there at almost exactly the same time as Charlie Wilson on his stretcher. A woman and a small boy followed a few paces behind the stretcher. From the terrified expression on her tear-stained face, from the little boy's perplexed, blank stares at the figure on the stretcher, I knew that these were the injured man's wife and child.

Begging the woman to calm herself and take a seat, I approached the husband and asked him if he felt equal to

The Man on the Flying Trapeze

giving me some details of the accident. This, with my free interpretation of it, was the story he told me.

Charlie Wilson, conscientious building supervisor that he was, had climbed to the roof of a new building the firm were completing and which was destined to become their latest construction in the town. Inspecting the structure of this building with his usual precision, he inadvertently caught his foot, slipped and somersaulted his way down—for all the world as if he were gaily giving a performance on a flying trapeze!

Unfortunately, being very far removed from a professional acrobat, Charlie Wilson had not been supplied by his firm with a protective net. There was, therefore, nothing between roof and ground to break his fall and he had crashed remorselessly to the ground!

One acrobatic feat he did, however, manage to achieve! Somehow or other, Charlie contrived to land on his feet—no mean trick this, by any standard! And it was just this, above all, that was to save his life. For falling from the roof-top of a three-storey building on to his head, or even his back, would have spelt certain death.

Yet a fall such as Charlie's, however considerate it may have proved to the rest of him, was anything but a picnic for his feet! These, when I examined them, were so swollen and deformed that they appeared more like elephant's than the feet of a human being. It was surprising, also, that, as far as could be seen with the naked eye, there was no evidence of internal injuries. Yet this last blessing still required definite confirmation by means of various tests and X-rays.

Luckily for Mr. Wilson the ambulance attendants had given him morphine to alleviate his pain. He was therefore tranquil and quite capable of giving a clear account of his 'acrobatic feat'.

When I was already on the point of ordering X-rays and laboratory tests, Mrs. Wilson suddenly became wilful and difficult.

The Man on the Flying Trapeze

'Doctor,' she addressed me in a high-pitched, hysterical voice, 'I don't want a thing done here—not, at least, until I speak to Mr. Davies, Charlie's boss!'

For the moment, I failed to realize what Mr. Davies she was referring to, though this was a name of national repute—again there were not a few Davieses with no claim to fame. What I did realize, however, was that some people preferred to attend better-known hospitals, such as the 'University of California' or the 'General Hospital of Los Angeles'.

In the agreement between our hospital and the town council, it was specified only that accident cases were to be brought to us for first aid and emergency treatment. Once this was carried out, relatives or the patients themselves were quite at liberty, naturally, to choose any other hospital they wished. Some people did have a preference for places they were more familiar with or whose doctors they knew personally.

As a rule, none of us interfered with these decisions. I would merely give my candid opinion as to the advisability of moving the patient or as to the gravity of his condition. The rest I left to the discretion of relatives or the patient himself.

'All right, Mrs. Wilson,' I now replied calmly. 'Then you'd better ring your friend Mr. Davies right away!' Meanwhile I withdrew my orders for further investigations for the present, save only for the indispensable X-rays. We required these for our own protection as much as for Charlie's benefit, in case of later complications.

The patient was wheeled out of the X-ray department, while I awaited his wife's return from the telephone. In a few moments she was back with a purposeful look on her face.

'Mr. Davies would like my husband transferred to another hospital in Los Angeles!' I was informed in a courteous but decisive manner.

'I see. That's rather stup—ahem, unwise of Mr. Davies, I must say!' I replied with unconcealed sarcasm. 'The journey

The Man on the Flying Trapeze

to Los Angeles, right now, isn't exactly going to improve your husband's condition, you know.'

Mrs. Wilson regarded me with an unhappy look. 'We must do as Mr. Davies says, Doctor,' she told me, as if I had urged her to insult Mr. Davies personally. 'It seems to me you don't know who Mr. Davies is!' The terrible truth had only just dawned on her.

'I hate to admit it, Mrs. Wilson—but I honestly don't! Does it really matter so much—isn't your husband's health the main concern now?'

'Sure, sure—but Mr. Davies . . .'

'Oh, Mr. Davies—well, you can tell your Mr. Davies that I don't know who he is, any more than he seems to know who George Sava is!'

This first show of temper appeared to impress rather than upset Mrs. Wilson. For in a much milder tone she now suggested: 'Listen, Doctor, would you mind having a word with Mr. Davies yourself?'

'I'd be glad to!' I smiled.

While she was occupied in waiting for Mr. Davies to come on the other end of the phone again, the X-rays arrived. I examined them closely. As I had suspected, poor Mr. Wilson's feet were in a terrible mess. The fall from such a height and the weight of his own body had acted like a sledge-hammer on the bones of his heels. They were simply smashed into hundreds of tiny splinters.

Mrs. Wilson came to call me to the phone at last. A cultured voice, obviously in the habit of demanding respect and authority, informed me in clipped tones that Charlie Wilson was one of his most valued employees. He was also, I was told by the all-important Mr. Davies, a very dear personal friend. For this reason he wanted only the very best for him—money being no object!

'I quite understand, Mr. Davies,' said I, 'but I do happen to be a specialist myself and I sincerely believe that your

The Man on the Flying Trapeze

friend will receive as good treatment here as anywhere else.'

'Mm, I see,' mumbled Mr. Davies; though, to judge from the condescension in his voice, he did not see at all—at least, not what I wanted him to see!

'You are rather a small hospital, you will admit,' he added, making some effort to excuse himself.

'Quite true, Mr. Davies! But it would be most inadvisable to move him just now.' My irritation was quite obvious and was frankly intended to be.

That day, it seems, I could obtain results only by being blunt. For as with Mrs. Wilson, so it was now with the esteemed Mr. Davies.

'Well—since you put it like that, Dr. Sava, maybe you had better see to Charlie yourself!'

'It's entirely up to you, Mr. Davies!' I told him tartly.

'O.K., O.K., you see to him!'

'As you like!' And with a curt goodbye I replaced the receiver.

While I was thus engaged, my two assistants had not remained idle. They must somehow have allayed Mrs. Wilson's doubts, and exaggerated my skill to such an extent that the Mrs. Wilson of a few minutes back was no more. Instead, if not exactly effusive, she was certainly most eager for me to treat her husband.

The patient himself, now that the morphine had worn off and the pain was returning, was only too anxious to be attended to as soon as possible. 'I only hope, Doctor, that it won't take too many operations to get me back on my feet again,' he moaned pathetically.

'Too many operations—why, what gives you that idea?'

'Just that another guy at the works had rather a similar accident last year. And he's still under treatment after several operations!' Sadly he added: 'He's still none too well—even now!'

This news aroused my curiosity. 'Would you by any chance know what kind of treatment they gave your friend?'

The Man on the Flying Trapeze

‘Oh, they operated on the guy’s feet at least three times—and he still has to use crutches!’

During this conversation with Charlie Wilson a rather curious idea was beginning to take shape in my head. I remembered my early days as house surgeon at an orthopaedic hospital in Germany. The professor there would not have dreamed of operating on cases such as Wilson’s. In those days people had a positive dread of so-called open reductions of fractures—involving surgery. Everything was, therefore, done by the closed method. Of course, a point to bear in mind is that at the time there were no antibiotics with which to combat infection. Still, cases of successful treatment by this method sprang persistently to my memory.

‘Well, why not apply it in this case?’ something challenged me. What had we to lose? If the fracture could not be reduced by this method there was always plenty of time afterwards to operate, with no harm done! If, on the other hand, this method should prove successful, Charlie would be on his feet in three or four months’ time—having suffered far less discomfort than an operation would have caused him.

‘Mr. Wilson,’ I said, ‘what would you say if I told you that there might just be a chance—only a chance, mind you—of curing you without even one operation?’

He regarded me with an almost reproachful look; how could I trifle about such a serious matter?

‘I’d say you were kiddin’, Doctor. Why, it’s just impossible!’ He was almost cross now. ‘I told you about my pal—three operations and still on crutches!’

Not in the least put off by his lack of enthusiasm, I told him: ‘Suppose we just forget your friend for the moment and concentrate only on your own case! I want you to listen to me carefully now, will you?’

I could see that Charlie was looking around for his wife; feeling no doubt that she, too, should be consulted. I therefore asked Mrs. Wilson to join us before I began my explanation.

The Man on the Flying Trapeze

In language as simple and untechnical as I could I told them what I intended doing. I stressed, in particular, that should the 'closed reduction' fail, we could operate the next day. Looking at each other, then at me, they at length both smiled faintly in agreement.

Now I had to prepare myself for this undeniably difficult method of treatment. While an anaesthetic was administered to the patient by Dave Meyer, I explained this technique to Dave and my two assistants. To my relief, not only did they not raise any objection, nor regard me sceptically as a crank, but they actually appeared to be most intrigued.

'It's certainly worth a try, George! If it does succeed it will be quite a little triumph! It would save Mr. Wilson a lot of time, pain and discomfort,' said Dave. 'Yes,' he repeated, 'it's certainly worth a try!'

When the patient was comfortably under, I started to manipulate all the broken bones of the feet, trying to arrange them back in their normal position. Another X-ray showed us that I had actually managed this to a very satisfactory degree. Now the only bones still requiring attention were the splintered bones of the heels.

Here I was momentarily at a loss—how was I to bring these innumerable pieces together? Then the answer came to me!

We found two square pieces of wood and placed them one on either side of the left foot. Next, I remembered the miniature iron-press the technicians used in the operating theatre for gripping metal rods, when a piece needed to be sawn off.

The foot, with a piece of wood at each side, was placed inside this press. I now screwed slowly, carefully, very gradually compressing the broken bones of the foot.

As the two halves of this machine began to come closer to meeting-point, an eerie crunching of bones could be heard quite distinctly. When I judged that the bone-fragments had

The Man on the Flying Trapeze

been sufficiently pressed together, I released the screw. Then the procedure was repeated on the other foot.

More X-rays. We waited in trepidation to see their results. When we had examined the plates, a great sigh of relief was audible from all sides, the tension lessened and we felt greatly encouraged.

By no means were the bones normal as yet; but from the horrible mess there now emerged at least the outline of the original shape of the bones! One thing was obvious—we were on the right track. Now, greatly encouraged, I repeated the same procedure twice more on each foot. Each time, I ventured to screw the press just a bit tighter. More crunching of bones—but at this stage nothing could deter us from our task.

At last it was over. The final X-rays revealed that the multiple fractures of the heel-bones were reduced perfectly by the drastic pressure of the press's iron jaw. Now there remained only one more thing to be done: to enclose the feet in plaster of Paris—complete immobility being most essential.

Meanwhile, in the waiting-room, two more of the Wilson children had joined their mother in her long, nerve-racking vigil. As soon as I entered, their eyes were quickly raised to my face, endeavouring eagerly to read there how Mr. Wilson had fared. I did not keep them in suspense.

Smiling encouragingly, I held up the final X-ray plates to the light and beckoned to the little group to come and inspect them. The plates showed unmistakably that the bones were in the right position. 'As you can see,' I explained, pointing to the bones, 'we have managed to manipulate them into the correct position!'

'Does that mean . . .?' Mrs. Wilson hesitated.

'It means that he's going to be all right.'

She seemed hardly able to believe it and tears of relief began to course down her thin cheeks.

The Man on the Flying Trapeze

'Your husband won't need an operation—Mother Nature should do the rest now!'

'Will Charlie really be all right—really fit again?' she insisted.

'Yes, my dear, he'll be all right.'

'Oh, thank God, thank God!' At last she gave vent to all the pent-up emotions of those recent, devastating few hours and burst out crying.

Charlie Wilson remained at the hospital for about four months. At fortnightly intervals we controlled the healing of the fractures by X-rays. The pain had gradually subsided and I could not help fostering a suspicion that our friend was actually beginning to enjoy his enforced idleness. But then, what hard-working man would not enjoy a rest when there is no pain and little discomfort involved? Besides, it seemed to me that the gentle husband did not wish to add to the already over-worked Mrs. Wilson's burdens. So Charlie, an easy-going, friendly type, made the best of his unexpected leisure.

His plaster of Paris bandages were changed each month for three months, after which they could finally be discarded. During the fourth and last month, Charlie needed only physiotherapy and massage.

When Charlie Wilson could at last resume work again he walked as well as the next man. However, I made him give me one solemn promise!

'Charlie, my boy, promise that from this day forth your days as an acrobat are over and done with!'

'Ha, don't you worry yourself, Dr. Sava,' he said, grinning from ear to ear. 'I solemnly promise that the only climbing I'll ever do again will be gettin' in and out of bed! And that I'll not only promise—I'll swear it on the Holy Bible!'

Christmas in California



Incredibly—here it was again, only a few days away—Christmas! Yet what a special, gleaming cloak of riches it was draped in, this Christmas in California. Los Angeles was aflame with colour and illuminations of fabulous design. California takes its Christmas celebrations very seriously, and when an American gives his all to some undertaking, the result cannot fail to be, to say the least, overpoweringly impressive.

The great, wide boulevards are ablaze with myriads of fairy-lights; sparkling, twinkling, jubilant man-made Technicolor stars! Night after night, people flocked into the main avenues of the city, devouring the excitement in the air with ravenous, insatiable appetites.

Then there are the shops; glittering tinsel vying for pride of place with the multitude of breath-taking goods in the windows. A child's Utopia; a shopper's paradise; a purse's doom!

Even if Jane and I had been hesitant to be drawn into this Christmas whirl, Gregory could hardly be denied the thrill, the like of which he had never yet experienced in his little life! Yet we too were caught up in the excitement, drawn as if with magnets into the throng of merry-makers.

And why not? I had worked hard, so a little spree would do me no harm. 'All work and no play . . .' as the saying

Christmas in California

goes; I may have become a 'Jack of all trades', but I did not intend to become 'a dull boy' to boot! I firmly believe that the enchantment of California at that season played a major part in deciding our future for the months to follow.

Just before we set off to motor into Los Angeles, my wife came into the sitting-room with some letters that had arrived from London that morning. Our three children left at home had written rather sad little epistles. The Christmas holidays were here and they felt lonesome and missed us terribly.

Each separate letter mentioned Christmas—a Christmas without the company and comfort of parents, made doubly unattractive by the depressing, foggy London weather. My wife, who was reading the letters to me, grew more subdued the further she read, her voice quite tearful.

I glanced through the long bay-window, and just then the last rays of the setting sun pervaded the room with golden warmth. I had a fleeting vision of myself glancing through another window: the window of my own house in London. The desolate, cheerless sight that had met me then came back to me. Poor children—this is what they had to face each day while we were revelling in the sunshine.

My wife must secretly have been observing me, for she had stopped reading. 'George!'

'Yes, dear—nothing wrong in the letters, is there?'

'No, not really, the children seem all right! But—well, just tell me honestly—do you enjoy working here?'

'Jane, what a question! Can't you tell that I do?' And I repeated dreamily: 'Yes, I like it immensely!' Then I noticed her troubled expression. 'What makes you ask?'

'Oh, I don't know really—unless it's because we're supposed to be going back so soon. Have you handed in your notice yet?'

'No, no need to. Dave knows I only took the post temporarily; he won't expect a formal notice.'

Jane lit a cigarette with nervous, jerky movements. 'But—but you don't really want to go back yet?' She blew enormous

Christmas in California

rings of smoke into the air. 'You'd like to stay on for a while, wouldn't you, George?'

'Then you've guessed! It's true enough, but only if that's what you really want too!'

Now her face cleared as she said: 'I've been thinking.'

'Oho?' I interrupted.

'No, listen, dear! The weather is terrible in London at this time of year!' And she repressed a shiver at the mere thought of the cold. 'Our poor children there, George, it just isn't fair! Couldn't—couldn't we bring them over? How they'd enjoy this heavenly climate! And think of the good it would do them! And . . .' She was being carried away by her ideas again. 'And we could all spend Christmas together—a proper family Christmas—and . . . !'

She broke off to look at me expectantly, a girlish, excited glimmer in her eyes.

'Why not bring them over, indeed?' I had pronounced the all-important verdict. 'Apart from the weather, they'll get such a lot of fun from all the decorations and processions and things.'

That was how my 'two weeks' holiday' was given yet another little fillip, yet another lease of life!

As if afraid I might retract my decision, my wife sat down then and there to write to the children and make arrangements for their journey. To show her I had no thought of going back on my word, I lifted the receiver as she wrote and sent off a cable to London informing them of our latest plans. That way they would be ready and packed by the time they received Jane's letter.

A short while later, we drove over to Dave Meyer's house. From the gate we could see Dave relaxing in a deck-chair, his hair still gleaming wet from the swim he had obviously just taken.

As soon as he saw us, he rose and walked over to us. 'Jane, George—well, what d'you know—this is a pleasant surprise!' Hastily he pulled up some more deck-chairs, patted his

Christmas in California

hair and poured us a drink. 'Forgive the get-up, won't you? But honestly, I'm sure glad you dropped in! It was about time you came over like this, informally! At least, you're getting a bit Americanized—unless——' He frowned. 'You haven't by any chance come to say goodbye, now have you?'

'So that's what you were hoping for, was it, friend Dave?' Laughingly, Dave shook his wet mane in negation. 'Anyway, we've got a surprise for you, haven't we, Jane? We're bringing the children over for Christmas!'

Seeing the way Dave's face instantly lit up, any doubts I may have had as to the wisdom of my impulsive resolve were now happily swept aside. I felt his friendliness, his warm-heartedness, and I was content.

'If I've got your meaning right, George, then I think we've as good an excuse as we're likely to get for a little celebration!'

'Yes, Dave, you seem to have got my meaning correct. Jane and I would like to stay on a little longer—if that's all right with you!'

Dave nearly rolled out of his deck-chair. 'Say, are you kidding? And with us nearly sick with the worry of losing you! Will I have you!'

'Now, Dave, don't overdo it! I know quite well what a moody old so-and-so I can be!'

He burst out laughing. 'We'll not argue about that! Have a drink.' He reached for the glasses.

'Dave,' I said huskily, 'I'd like you to know one thing: I've been happier with you people here than I've been for a hell of a long time!'

Dave handed me the filled glass. I took it, and we smiled in easy camaraderie.

While Dave and I continued celebrating in our own well-tried fashion, Jane and Katie were combining their talents to 'whisk up a little somethin', as Katie put it. Gregory, needless to say, was splashing about in the pool with the Meyer

Christmas in California

children, their gay, careless laughter providing a cheerful note in the gathering dusk.

My wife, more excited each day at the imminent arrival of our three children, occupied herself in elaborate preparations. She took particular pleasure in putting up colourful, gay decorations—with the disastrous assistance of young Gregory—and in hanging presents for each member of the family on the tall, freshly-cut tree. As for me, I threw myself into work at the hospital with renewed fervour and interest.

One small incident, however, almost marred, and very nearly put an end to this happy time! Driving towards Los Angeles one evening to collect yet another parcel for my wife, I suddenly felt my heart beating furiously and beads of sweat gathering on my brow! I was on the Freeway, in the very hub of the traffic, when I noticed all at once that 'Old Faithful' was no longer under my control!

The brakes seemed to have given way; how on earth was I ever to stop the car? Anyone who has driven on the Californian Freeways in the height of the rush-hour will, I am sure, sympathize with me in my predicament! What a devilish situation! My only hope was that the car in front of me would not slow down; that would have meant my crashing head-on into its rear!

The Freeway sloped disastrously down-hill. For once, I had actually cause to be grateful to Californian drivers for their endless passion for speed—for which, until that day, I had often cursed them roundly.

As my car drew ever nearer to the one in front, I can now only recall the ice-cold sweat on my forehead—that sensation of utter impotence, utter helplessness!

The road dipped, became steeper still. My car accelerated. It was inevitable; any moment, any second I would crash! And there was nothing, nothing I could do to prevent it. My bumper almost touched the rear of the machine in front. I looked about me in frenzied despair. 'Can I overtake?'

Christmas in California

The surging sea of madly speeding cars in all four lanes made it clear to me that this would be certain suicide. I almost wanted to close my eyes and wait for it—wait for the fatal, unavoidable crash!

Then, whether because the driver in front had become aware of the lurking danger on his tail and accelerated, or because the road had levelled somewhat, the distance began to widen! My relief at this small miracle was wild, crazed. Yet by no means was my hazard at an end.

A road-sign! If the letters had been engraved in gold or diamonds, they could not have been more wondrous, more precious to me, for they told me what I had not dared to hope for—salvation had come! The lane I was in was about to deviate into a side-turning; was ever a mere road-sign such a thing of beauty? For I knew that I should find a lay-by there, especially built for such emergencies at all these turnings. Ramming my car into the kerb, I came to a halt!

I leant back in my seat, positively luxuriating in the blessed knowledge that I was alive and unharmed. Automatically, I mopped my brow, shook my head in disbelief several times and sat quite still, in an effort to regain my shattered senses.

In these last few petrifying moments, I had suffered not one, but a conglomeration of disasters! Visions of all the most ghastly accident cases I had ever attended during these few months took possession of my mind, until I could no longer separate them from reality.

Broken arms, broken legs; fingers, feet red and swollen; faces cut to ribbons; mangled bodies—they all performed a weird, frenzied dance of death! Jeering at me, mocking me; grotesquely inflated and enlarged—a veritable 'Grand Guignol'! Which part of me was to join this grisly league? I shuddered. Yet now that it was over and I was not even injured, an inexplicable, dragging exhaustion had swept over me. I sorely needed a few minutes of tranquillity.

Still in the same position, staring blankly into space, I

Christmas in California

was startled by a tall man's silhouette. At length it dawned on me that he was a Highway Patrol.

'What's bothering you, Mister? Is there anything wrong?' he said laconically, pushing his head through the open window of my car. I looked up at him stupidly.

'Wrong?' I repeated. 'Oh, wrong! No, not now, Officer!' I felt on the verge of bursting into fits of hysterical laughter, so amusing did his question appear at that moment. Luckily I managed to stifle the impulse, wiped my brow with my sleeve once more, tore myself out of the seat and stepped from the car.

I inhaled deeply, as if I had been cooped up in a vault for weeks. 'By Jove!' I exclaimed, for no reason I could name, resorting all at once to one of the most British of expressions! 'By Jove, Officer—am I glad to be alive!' Then something else occurred to me. 'And am I glad to see you—I could do with some help!'

The officer regarded me with a puzzled frown. There was nothing visibly wrong either with me or with my car. He might well have taken me for a 'nut-case', as they are so aptly termed in America! Perhaps he only thought me drunk; at any rate, I concluded, dazed as I was, that he was far from happy about me. Yet when he came close to my face, clearly trying to catch a whiff of my breath, I realized that I had better do some very quick explaining.

I had nothing to fear from the state of my breath, for I had not touched a drop that day. Possibly, in my excited state, I was inclined to exaggerate, but a Highway Patrol could well be unpleasant, that much I had heard all too frequently. These men came into contact with all manner of people; not a few of them cranks and criminals.

'My name is Dr. George Sava,' I now told him. 'I'm chief surgeon of the Merryville Hospital!' Still that distrustful, suspicious look on his face. 'I—I was on my way to Los Angeles, when my brakes started to go wrong. How I managed to come to a safe stop here, God alone knows!'

Christmas in California

His expression began to change; he was definitely listening more seriously to me. 'Aw, now I get it, Doctor! For a minute, I just couldn't make you out!' He was as happy as a little boy, at having solved the riddle.

'I guess we'd better get you towed away, then!'

'I'd be greatly obliged; and by the way, here's my driving licence!'

'Shucks, Doctor—no need for that. Now don't you worry yourself—you just stay here, while I go get some help!' No sooner said than done; he mounted his powerful motor-bike and with a tumultuous roar took off and was whisked out of sight.

'Such a nice helpful chap!' I congratulated myself. 'He'd never have locked me up—still, one never can tell!'

Half an hour later, poor Old Faithful was shamelessly and none too gently scooped up by the scruff of her decrepit neck and towed mercilessly away to the garage. I sat next to the driver of the lorry, feeling conscience-stricken at my old friend's undignified exit from the roads of living motor-cars! Much as I might bemoan her fate, exit it would undoubtedly have to be. I could certainly never take the risk of driving her again!

Once at the garage, I telephoned my wife and told her briefly why I had been delayed.

'Thank heaven you're all right, darling! You'll have to get rid of "Old Faithful" now, you do realize that, don't you?'

'I'm afraid so. I suppose I should have done so long ago.'

I now gave Jane the address of the garage. 'Would you phone Pat Hurley for me and ask him to pick me up here as soon as possible, please?'

'I'll do that right away,' she promised.

Pat Hurley was not a business manager for nothing. For he not only came to my aid himself, but for good measure he arrived in the company of a 'buddy' of his—a car-dealer! My wife had no doubt given him details over the phone.

Christmas in California

'I was lookin' for you all over at the hospital, Dr. Sava. I sure never expected to find you tucked away here!'

'Better here, Pat, than in our little emergency ward—or worse!' Now I could afford to 'play it cool'.

'The Lord have mercy! Now is that the way to talk—and you an intelligent man!' When he grew excited, our Pat was as Irish as the Blarney Stone.

'You're right, Pat, one shouldn't joke about such things. But why were you looking for me?'

'I just wanted to let you know how happy I am that you won't be leaving us yet awhile. And,' he chuckled, 'believe it or not, I was going to force you, with all the powers that be, to get rid of the old jalopy!'

'You were?' I exclaimed.

'Yes sir! That was no car for you, if you'll pardon my sayin' so! Anyway, that little job has been done for me already!'

'Is that so? They might be able to fix her up yet—a little surgery, you know!' I jested with him.

'Sure now, Dr. Sava, don't be takin' the mickey out of me! You know as well as I do that she's had it—thanks be to God. And now I hope you're goin' to get yourself a car that's—well, more suitable!'

'I see you've got it all neatly planned, Mr. Hurley. Well, it so happens——' I paused briefly, to keep my young friend in suspense a while longer. 'It so happens I'm in complete agreement with you!'

'Glory be, now you're talkin', Dr. Sava!' exclaimed the relieved Pat.

'Any suggestions, then?'

'You bet!' said he proudly, glancing at the man at his side. 'There's Jack here—he's a car-dealer!'

'Why, that's just perfect! Ahem, what shall I do with my—Cadillac?' The last, exalted word rolled from my lips with great emphasis. I wanted to impress the rank of my old car on the dealer, at any rate.

Christmas in California

'I'll trade it in for you, in part exchange for a new one,' Jack told me. My friend Pat gave me no time to reply. Forestalling me, he said hastily:

'He's goin' to allow you three hundred and fifty dollars for it!' In truth, I believe he had dreaded that I might give my car away for nothing, knowing well enough by now how unbusinesslike I could be on occasion. 'Three hundred and fifty,' he saw fit to repeat, 'against a new Ford!'

Only now did he remember that his friend was also slightly involved in this transaction and turned towards the latter: 'That's O.K. by you, Jack, isn't it?'

'Sure, sure, Pat! If the doctor here's a pal o' yours I'll be glad to do business with him!'

Good old Pat! Thanks to him, I was not only to be rid of 'Old Faithful', but to receive almost double the amount I had paid for her originally!

I was late home for dinner that night. For over two hours I transacted most vital business. First 'Old Faithful' had to be driven to Jack's garage, or rather dragged there. Then Pat and I spent quite a while looking for a new car—a car that I liked the look of and that Pat considered fitting to my position.

At last we found one that seemed to meet both requirements. We settled on a white and green Ford Fairline. Admittedly, it was Pat who had first singled this car out. His reason for the selection impressed me all the more, if only for its utter unexpectedness!

'Look, Dr. Sava,' he had said, 'this here is the perfect lady's car!'

'Where do I come in then, Pat?' I queried.

'Oh, Doctor!' he laughed. 'Can't you see—you must give this one to your wife! Now that you'll be havin' your four children here she'll sure need a car to take them around in!'

I scratched my head pensively. 'Mm, true enough; but after all, what about me?'

Christmas in California

'You'll get another one for yourself, of course!' And with a twinkle in his bright-blue Irish eyes, he added: 'Now don't you go sayin' you can't afford it—you'll just have to!'

I saw his point. Life in California without a car, for either man or woman, was hardly a life at all! With four children to look after, Jane certainly had to have a car. Then and there, without giving it any further thought, I registered the elegant machine in her name!

'Pat,' I announced, 'you must come and have dinner with us this evening! I want you to be there when I give Mrs. Sava "our" Christmas box! If anything, you had more of a hand in this than I did myself!'

'Well, now, and here was I only after thinkin' how I'd love to see your wife's face when she gets it.'

'All I can say, Pat, is that that Irish blarney of yours must have at least as much of a kick to it as your Irish whisky—if it can make me part with two thousand eight hundred dollars on the spot!

We gave the present to Jane. Not, however, before we had played a little game with her. We managed to make her quite miserable by painting the grimmest possible picture of life without 'Old Faithful'! Whenever she now wished to go to town, she would have to use her legs, we pointed out; in fact, wherever she might plan to go—legs it would have to be from now on! Since we were also rather hungry by then, we delayed the big event further still until after dinner. It would have to be a fitting climax to such an eventful day!

As we walked down our drive, chatting nonchalantly, I suddenly handed the car-keys to Jane and came to a stop in front of the shining new car. 'May I introduce you to—your Christmas present, Mrs. Sava!' I told her very quietly.

'My what—my Christmas present?' Yet seeing that it was unmistakably a woman's car, the full impact of my words struck her! Her face took on a positive glow, as she stood

Christmas in California

there in the moonlight. Her expression gave Pat and myself the pleasure we had anticipated all evening.

'Is it really for me, George?' She still could not quite believe it.

'Every beautiful inch of her! Now let's see you drive her, shall we?'

Two days later, Christmas Eve, we found ourselves once again at Los Angeles airport, to welcome our three other children. Our first Christmas in California was an unforgettable one with the whole family reunited! For three weeks my wife drove the children all over the coast of California. Seldom had they enjoyed a holiday more; never had I seen them gayer or fitter!

I, too, enjoyed that Christmas more than usual. Not only because of the family reunion, immense pleasure though it gave me. Yet another thing helped to make this holiday outstanding for me. For, I, too, was to receive a small Christmas present. What was more, given to me by no one else but myself! I had taken Pat's advice; on Boxing Day, therefore, I went to Los Angeles to buy myself a car.

It could hardly have been all due to Pat's blarney! Perhaps the intoxicating air of California played its part, too, or the realization that Pat had so suddenly brought home to me that I should have a decent car. One did have to 'keep up with the Joneses, didn't one? Not that I could remember ever having been perturbed about this aspect before!

Be that as it may, any excuse being better than none, I went out and presented myself with a Lincoln Continental. What a glorious beauty it was, too; for me it is the aristocrat of American cars!

When I took the family into the desert in it, windows tightly shut, air conditioning full on, I could not help exclaiming:

'It's good to be alive!'

Surgeons All



The medical set-up in California has some features not generally found elsewhere. First of all, there is the tendency to form so-called 'Medical Groups'. This signifies that a small number of practitioners agree to set up a practice together, open a surgery and begin to attend to patients. Occasionally, such a group will be joined by specialists of fair repute and ability. In this way, these general practitioners can immediately resort to the opinion and advice of a specialist in general surgery, paediatrics, gynaecology or any other specialized field. A medical group formed on such a pattern functions perfectly to the satisfaction of all concerned.

The standard of medical training in the States is, as a rule, very high. Their specialists, therefore, are men of good knowledge and ability. Thus there is no reason whatsoever why groups such as these should not be of great benefit to their community.

Not infrequently, they even erect their own hospitals, have their own X-ray plants and laboratories. Their patients could not ask for better care. Some of these fraternities have worked out pre-payment plans for their patients. A monthly subscription of a few dollars, paid into the institution's funds, will entitle members to over-all medical attention for themselves and their dependants.

Surgeons All

Other medical groups will accept people belonging to different insurance companies such as 'Blue Cross', 'The Hospital Sunday Fund' and various others. Any private patient, of course, settles his own fees for whatever services are rendered.

When surgery and medicine of a high standard are practised by conscientious, dedicated doctors, a patient can ask for no more. Unfortunately, however, by no means all the medical fraternities in California are staffed with trained, qualified specialists! More often than is credible, the group will consist of a few general practitioners and nothing more! Quite surprisingly, these men will then dare to tackle every form of treatment and surgery their patients may require!

Insufficiently trained for the task before them, they hope by some magic to become gynaecologists and ear, nose and throat specialists. They do not shrink, even, from performing major operations in general surgery and orthopaedics, acting also as children's specialists, if need be. The astonishing thing is that not a few of these G.P.s do in time become efficient surgeons. Those chosen ones, no doubt, have an innate, natural gift which, although unpolished by orthodox training, is greatly enhanced by practice.

I myself have witnessed operations performed by general practitioners—gastric resections or hysterectomies carried out with such apparent knowledge and dexterity that they could not possibly have been told apart from the work of a specialist surgeon. Yet since such natural ability is all too rare, some of the operations performed by general practitioners that I attended were far from satisfactory even. These men may well have been fair practitioners, but as surgeons they were not very skilful. No doubt they were honest enough men; yet they had undertaken a task for which they were neither sufficiently trained nor intended. It is easy, then, to picture the difficulties in which they were liable to land themselves.

Surgeons All

Part of the blame for these unsatisfactory conditions must in all fairness go to the inviting, tempting Californian way of life. The State of California is one of the wealthiest in America. As might be expected, it becomes the target of day-dreams, and most immigrants have at the back of their minds the hope that they too will eventually settle in this Utopia.

Who can blame them? It is a tempting enough goal. Brilliant sunshine the whole year round; an easy, informal life; no difficulty in earning a substantial livelihood. A prospect such as this cannot fail to attract.

Nearly every day brings its new settlers, therefore, to the golden shores of California. Small towns and developments mushroom forth almost overnight; new communities blossom across the valleys and along the seashores.

This constant increase in the population requires an equal increase in the number of its public servants. So it is natural that doctors, too, flock to California—what is more, doctors by the dozen!

Now many of these doctors are newly qualified, having come direct from medical college, and most are very young. Many more are foreign graduates, attracted by the numerous fables about California: enchanting, ensnaring fairy-tales that must needs draw a young man just starting out in life. No matter where they come from, however, they all have one thing in common—they are naturally anxious to make a good living—as quickly as possible. This mass of new doctors has its fair share of well-trained specialists. But it also has its share of ordinary, non-specialised general practitioners.

Thus there can be no escaping the fact that the majority is made up not of the sorely-needed specialists, but of general practitioners—practitioners with, perhaps, more ambition than training and qualifications.

In talking about this state of affairs, however dispassionately, I am not insensitive to the possibility of causing

Surgeons All

displeasure to some of my Californian colleagues. Yet let me assure them, as well as everyone else, that I do not write this in order to be unkind. I am myself far too devoted to California, and to my own profession, to do so. I am merely writing this in the sincere hope that at least some of the general practitioners concerned will at last waken to their shortcomings. It cannot be such a rude awakening, for they must surely have quite an inkling already of the harm they can do to their own good reputation.

My hope is that they may cease to perform any operations they are not confident of performing well. They are, after all, generally speaking good doctors; let them rest on these laurels. No passably good doctor in California can fail to make a satisfactory living, so why attempt to strain their gifts? With just a little less ambition, how much trouble they could spare themselves and others! They would not have to bear the shame of undignified malpractice prosecutions and could save themselves hundreds of dollars in premiums for medical protection. Moreover, because of them, not only they but most other doctors are at present compelled to pay out these large sums for protection.

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that many American patients are flagrantly greedy! Whether they become so only when they are patients, or whether they simply consider the medical profession particularly easy prey, particularly vulnerable—the fact remains that they are constantly itching to lay their fingers on ‘easy money’. They seem to live in the constant hope that their doctor might, by some stroke of good fortune, make even the minutest error! Given the slightest cause, they will rush off to their lawyers and sue the bewildered man for all he is worth and more. What matter, so long as they can rake in a little ‘easy dough’?

It is for this reason that medical men must be doubly on their guard, take double and triple precautions not to further the unworthy ambitions of some of their patients. If even the

Surgeons All

most highly-qualified men are not secure from being smeared by such people, how much more endangered are those who attempt operations or render services beyond their abilities! Sooner or later they are bound to land in scalding water.

It was not long before I myself was to come face to face with this upsetting problem. Merryville Hospital was, of course, a private concern, owned solely by Dr. Meyer. Most patients there were either our own, sent directly to us, or accident cases.

Dr. Meyer, however, was not only a good physician but a wholly good human being. He did not think twice, therefore, about following the normal practice of similar hospitals in the State and opening the doors of his hospital to all the general practitioners in the vicinity, thus enabling them to bring along their patients and themselves carry out treatment at Merryville. I considered this both generous and wise, since our hospital was well-equipped and extremely comfortable. It was understood that should a patient of one of these guest doctors require major surgery, he would call either me or another specialist from Los Angeles.

In most of the cases this is exactly what did take place. I was frequently asked to take over and remove a kidney or gall-bladder, or deal with a gastric ulcer case, and the physician on whose patient I was operating would then himself act as my assistant. In this way they did their patients a service without themselves suffering any financial loss. For the patients were still theirs no matter who might perform the operations. Moreover, by assisting me at these operations their own knowledge could not but have been increased, so that if in the future they were faced with the necessity of performing surgery, they would at least have become fair surgeons!

Quite a few of these men were to become my friends. In the course of time, when I judged that one or other of them had gained sufficient experience in surgery, I would let him

Surgeons All

perform some uncomplicated operation—perhaps an appendix or hernia—and at a later stage, if he proved himself capable, even a more serious case.

At such times it was I who would assist, giving gentle guidance all the while. Knowing that someone was at hand to help out if he should falter, the doctor usually set to work with added confidence.

These men were harmless, merely endeavouring to learn. How much better they were than those who stubbornly thought they could perform any operation which came their way; who had their patients admitted and were then quite prepared to go courageously ahead with operations for maladies that would have taxed the best of surgeons!

What particular fascination, what outstanding attractions does California have, then, to draw so great a number of people—of doctors—daily to its shores? Of course, the mere fact that it does have shores, and golden, sandy ones at that, is in itself a good reason. However, there are other states in the U.S. which can boast of this particular advantage. Florida, for one, with its famous Miami Beach, is certainly well up to standard in this respect. Yet for some reason Florida, in the eyes of most people, remains primarily a holiday attraction, whereas California has become not merely a place with a wonderful climate for holidays, but one which inspires a feeling of permanency. One longs to remain there, to settle down.

Undoubtedly its climate—its beaming blue skies and radiant, all-embracing sunshine—is the first of its many charms. It cannot but beguile the visitor, giving as it does such a gentle and pleasant fillip to one's well-being and entire outlook on life. Then, as with the manifold charms of a bewitching woman, one warms little by little to all the other, more subtle delights of the country. And few will deny that there are not many countries which surpass California for sheer visual beauty.

Surgeons All

Not only are her beaches smooth, honey-coloured perfection, but the scenery in general—the luxuriant orchards, the rich verdure and then again the stark, dramatic contrast of miles and miles of desert—all these go to make California the unique dazzler she is.

Her cities, too, above all Los Angeles, are captivating in their luxurious, man-made splendour, with the sobering background of natural loveliness: hills gleaming in the sunlight, shimmering silver under a full moon.

Is it any wonder that people from all walks of life should wish to settle down there? And doctors especially, so constantly reminded each day of their lives of the pain and suffering endured by man, are perhaps most susceptible of all to such carefree beauty. In such surroundings it becomes a little easier to forget the atmosphere of illness and ether and to relax, once work is done.

After all, what made me lay aside a far from unsuccessful practice in London, if not the smiling, enchanting face of California, haunting me ever more persistently the colder and bleaker the English winter became? But is climate and scenic beauty, it will be argued, really sufficient to induce doctors—some, like myself, far from beginners—to start life anew?

Climate and surroundings are the prime, the most apparent inducements. As one grows more accustomed to these, however, it is the smaller, less obvious things which, in the end, are the most endearing.

There is the informal life that everyone, from bell-boy to film star, is able to lead in California. And is anyone more tied to formality in most other parts of the world than a doctor? His clothes alone are the epitome of formality, whether in or out of surgery—but not so in California!

For example, take the impromptu invitation we received one afternoon, shortly after I had returned from the hospital. My wife was wearing slacks, the children were in shorts

Surgeons All

and I was relishing the freedom of flannels and an open shirt.

'George,' said my wife, 'the Gaynors want us to come to a barbecue they're giving.'

'Fine,' I smiled. 'When?'

'Oh, now!' Jane informed me.

'Mm, hadn't we better—oh, I keep forgetting—we needn't get changed, need we, Jane?'

'Of course not—not in California!'

So off we all went to the Gaynors' barbecue. Jane stayed in slacks, the children in shorts and I in my beloved attire of flannels and shirt. Where else is there such complete freedom from all social 'musts'? This, then, is yet another of California's attractions.

And just as their social life is informal, Californians have an equally informal approach to most other matters. This applies, too, to the way in which they will sometimes inundate an ordinary G.P. or young doctor just out of college with cases more suitable for a specialized, more experienced man. And doctors, being at least as fallible as other mortals, cannot but succumb to the lure of temptation. Oscar Wilde expressed this perfectly through one of his characters. 'I can resist anything but temptation!' he made the harassed man exclaim.

Temptation in tempting California is indeed formidable for the young doctor or G.P. Out of the blue he may find himself confronted by a patient simply begging him to perform an operation, perhaps solely because he has made a correct diagnosis of the disease. Equally out of the blue he thus becomes a surgeon. As I have already mentioned, many of them, even if self-trained, turn out to be excellent surgeons. Others, unfortunately, are not quite so gifted: but then, no matter what training they had had, these men would probably never have made good surgeons. There is little doubt,

Surgeons All

moreover, that just as they would have done at medical school, they will soon abandon all aspirations to surgery and settle down to the many other tasks forever facing a doctor. For, try as he may, not every doctor can suddenly blossom out into a surgeon—not even in California!

Steer Clear of Relatives

No written law exists to decree that one must not operate on or treat relatives. Yet what does exist is a mutual understanding among doctors—to steer clear of relatives!

Whenever humanly possible, should a wife, child or relative of yours be taken ill—do call someone else! Personally, being an emotional man, I know full well that I could never act as surgeon to any member of my own family. In fact, the very idea fills me with dread! If any child of mine should only so much as cough, I am fully convinced that he is suffering from pneumonia. Should my daughter complain of a commonplace stomach-ache—I instantly visualize the child as victim of nothing less severe than generalized peritonitis! How in all the world, then, could I be an impartial, calm surgeon to my nearest and dearest?

Thank God, therefore, for helpful friends, ready and willing, at the first ring of the telephone, to come out at all hours of day or night! More often than not, though they will not openly complain, they return home groaning inwardly at the futile trip! Still, I do not grumble either—openly—should a colleague of mine happen to call me for some reason, or for the lack of it!

I can still recall, for instance—how could I do otherwise—a bitterly cold night in February, back in London. I had only

Steer Clear of Relatives

just settled down in bed, heartily grateful for its warmth and comfort, a steaming-hot glass of milk on my bedside table. It must have been a little after midnight. Outside the snow came down crisp and white. From where I lay, it was all very cheery, romantic and beautiful. But then, I was enveloped in soft blankets and could only see, not feel the winter night.

My phone, too, had behaved remarkably well all evening; I was at peace with the world. I was draining the last soothing drops from my glass, my hand on the light-switch, when the phone suddenly decided to rebel! There is surely no need for me to describe the blaring ugliness of its call, especially when one is just ready for sleep!

Had I not been a doctor, I suppose I could simply have let it ring; but in my profession, that would hardly do. Automatically, my hand reached for the receiver.

'George?'

'Ye-e-e-s!'

'Sybil here!'

'Sybil? Oh yes. Hello, Sybil—don't tell me I'm being asked to a party at this time of the night!'

Sybil was a good friend of ours: an actress of rather eccentric habits with a three-year-old girl she cherished and an actor-husband I presume she also cherished—in her own, often puzzling way! I could hear the sounds of deafening music at the other end and, knowing that Sybil was a great one for parties, particularly in the early hours, I took it that this was what she had in mind now.

'George, darling,' cooed our actress friend, 'I'm so terribly sorry to disturb you—I know how hard you work! But darling, honestly, something awful's happened—absolutely ghastly!'

'Why, Sybil, what is it? Have you had an accident?' I asked in worried tones.

'No, darling—it's baby—she's so frightfully ill, oh, just frightfully! I just can't think what to do!' And now she switched from coos to startling sobs, with lightning speed!

Steer Clear of Relatives

I must admit that I was sorely tempted to tell her to put an end to the row that threatened to split my ear-drums even at this distance. Yet, of course, there are some things one simply cannot say! I sighed in miserable resignation.

‘What exactly is wrong with Karen?’

‘She keeps on being sick! Oh, George, could you—would you come over, darling?’

So ‘darling’ reluctantly dragged himself from his bed, dressed, walked down the stairs, opened the front door and shuddered! It was freezing cold out of doors; the snow, so inviting from my window, was wet and clinging as I went to fetch the car from the garage.

I arrived at Sybil’s shivering and sneezing pitifully. The party was still in full swing and the heart-broken mother right in the centre of the hubbub. An outsize glass of something a great deal stronger than milk, I’d be bound, was clutched in her hand.

She sauntered up to me, slinky and captivating, maybe, but I was far too droopy to appreciate her attractions just then. ‘Drink, sweet?’ she sizzled.

‘No, thanks, Sybil. Let’s see Karen, shall we?’ And I sneezed loudly.

‘Right! Nanny is with the poor poppet—I’m so worried, George!’

‘You look it!’ I felt like saying, but nodded instead.

Little Karen had indeed been vomiting, as Nanny told me. But so would anyone else under the circumstances! For Karen had been taken to see her grandmother that day and had stuffed her tiny stomach with all the chocolate, cake and goodies she could lay her little hand on. Although Nanny had warned Sybil, the devoted mother would not hear of her baby going without supper. It was since supper that the child had been vomiting: a natural enough reaction from an over-loaded stomach.

I told Sybil, after examining Karen, that she was in the

Steer Clear of Relatives

pink of health. Then I prescribed a dose for her to stop the child's nausea. Nanny was sent in a taxi then and there to the all-night chemist's in Piccadilly, to fetch the prescription, and I took my leave, sneezing ever more furiously all the while.

Sybil phoned me the next morning, to tell me that Karen was fine and had eaten a hearty breakfast. I, on the other hand, had caught flu and was bed-ridden for the entire week!

Nevertheless, Karen might well have been seriously ill, so if Sybil had called me again a week later, I would undoubtedly have torn myself out of bed once again.

Trifling or serious, you cannot possibly refuse your services to friends. What I dread most of all is having to operate on a colleague's wife or child, or any other near member of his family! Without exception, each time this occurs I suffer waking nightmares plagued by the thought of untold complications. The worst of it is that there really are times when such complications do arise. After such occasions, when at last the patient does recover, it is I who am a nervous wreck!

Since, as you may have guessed, everything seems to happen to me, I was not to be spared this during my sojourn in California. To make matters just that extra bit worse, the patient this time was a relative of one of the two principal performers in the drama and a friend of the other!

Easter was almost upon us and I was in my sixth month of service: the sixth month, that is, of my 'two weeks' holiday'. By then Dave and Katie Meyer had become our close friends and we valued their friendship. The children, too, had become inseparable friends. It was only to be expected from sociable, hospitable people like the Californians, that the rest of their family were not to be excluded from this friendship. Thus, through Dave and Katie, we had also gained their parents, in-laws, brothers and sisters as friends. Hardly a week would pass in which all of us would not have a 'get-together' at one or other of our homes.

Steer Clear of Relatives

I cannot really say that when Dave called me to the bedside of one of his patients I had any particular foreboding. Yet certainly my heart sank when the occupant of that sick-bed turned out to be none other than his charming father-in-law.

Jerry Walker was a man of about sixty-five; a retired businessman, he enjoyed the good things of life and was inclined to stoutness. In particular, he relished his little drop of Scotch and, as with most others of such tastes, he paid for it in overweight.

I had already noticed that Jerry Walker was becoming a frequent visitor at the hospital of late. Not suspecting, however, that the ruddy-cheeked Jerry's visits were anything but social, I attached no further importance to them; for he and Dave were extremely fond of one another and would spend hours in discussion.

Seeing him in bed at the hospital, I was therefore completely taken aback. 'Jerry, good heavens! What business have you got to be in bed like this I'd like to know? We need those beds for sick people!'

'D'you hear that, Dave?' He wagged a finger at Dr. Meyer. 'That's exactly what I keep telling this son-in-law of mine! But he seems to think I've nothing better to do than to lie here in idleness and wait for you to give me the green light!' He seemed in the best of spirits, his face full of smiles.

I took Dave's arm and drew him away from the bed. 'What's supposed to be the trouble with Jerry? He seems happy enough!'

'He always is, that's nothing to go by with him! I'd like you to take a thorough look at him, George; after that I'll show you his X-rays.'

While a nurse assisted me in Mr. Walker's examination, Dave told me of the slight abdominal pains his father-in-law had been experiencing for the last few months. I noticed,

Steer Clear of Relatives

too, how Jerry recoiled visibly each time I touched a certain part of his stomach. Undoubtedly there was a suspicion of gastric ulcer, but this had yet to be confirmed by X-rays.

'Let's take a look at those X-rays now, Dave,' I said. 'See you, Jerry!' I called to his father-in-law, as I followed Dave out of the room.

After inspecting the X-rays, I knew that my suspicions had been well-founded. There it was—a deep-seated crater in the last portion of the stomach. There could be no doubt that he had an ulcer—rather a large one, judging from the plates. Most likely he had had it for quite some time, but, being the man he was, had chosen to ignore it.

'What d'you think, George?' Dave asked.

'Dave, I don't quite understand. Do you want to know what I think of his illness or what I think we should do about the ulcer?' I hedged. Yet seeing him wince at the mention of ulcer, I added more softly: 'Now look, Dave. You know just as well as I do that Jerry has an ulcer—and you're the last person I could or would want to fool!'

Gravely he nodded his head. 'Sure, I do know it's an ulcer! But what would you suggest as the best possible treatment? Remember, I want a frank answer, please, George!'

I looked at him for a moment, and by the strained expression on his face I could tell that he already knew the only reply I could give him. There was only one way, at this stage, of dealing with the ulcer; no doubt all Dave had wanted was my moral support.

'Look, Dave, your father-in-law is over sixty-five, isn't he?' Again he nodded. 'What's more, it appears he's had this ulcer for quite some time now. And we both know that a gastric ulcer in a person over fifty should certainly be operated on. Isn't that so?'

'Then you suspect malignancy?'

'Judging from Jerry's general appearance, I would say no; but, Dave, how can I be certain? No one can!'

Steer Clear of Relatives

'That's true enough, George. If only he'd told me about the pains sooner—he's such a tough old character!'

'I'd say he didn't want to bother you or anyone else with his troubles; he's that sort of chap! Anyway, now that we are sure it is an ulcer, I think in all honesty that you should arrange for an operation as soon as possible!'

Again Dave winced, yet I believed that in the circumstances the greatest service I could do for Jerry and Dave was to be as forthright as possible.

'Is your father-in-law willing to have the operation?' I now asked, purposely ignoring any personal sentiment so that Dave, too, should find it easier.

'I told him that he has an ulcer, but I just couldn't bring myself to tell him about the operation. That's what I'd like you to do, George! Make it quite clear to him that he really must have one!'

It was hardly a pleasant duty Dave had entrusted me with. Not over-enthusiastically, we made our way back to Jerry Walker's room, and were to realize with relief that Jerry was perfectly ready to face reality. We were, in fact, to meet with not the slightest opposition from him, for he was an educated, reasonable man.

'Well, you two, so you've caught me at last,' he told us with a cheeky grin. 'Let's get the whole business over and done with, then!'

Dave saw to all the necessary preparations himself; yet it was easy enough for me to gather that it was I who was expected to perform the actual operation. Nor did I feel in the least happy about this. For when all was said and done, Dave had known me for only a few months; more than enough time for two men to become friends, to be sure. But was it also sufficiently long for really assessing my true surgical merits? It made me uneasy to think that maybe just because he was such a loyal friend he might be reluctant to call in another specialist for fear of offending me.

Steer Clear of Relatives

We were enjoying our usual cup of coffee in his study, when I spoke up firmly.

'Do you really—and I mean really—want me to take the case?'

'Oh George, of course! Who else?'

'That's just the point. You know plenty of good surgeons in Los Angeles. Why not call in one of them?' Before he could interrupt, I added: 'I give you my word, Dave—I won't take it as a slight or an insult—on the contrary! You see, in a way I'd be almost glad if you did! I would, of course, give all the help I could!'

He stubbed out his cigarette. 'No, George; if I did call in another man, it would only be as a last resort, if you decline outright!' He looked me squarely in the eye. 'Maybe it will set your mind at rest if I tell you that the whole family have already discussed the matter and we all of us agreed that you are the man we want!'

What was I to do? Any further protests on my part would have been quite out of place. I would simply have to do the operation—I had no other alternative.

Jerry Walker was operated on two days later. Understandably enough, Dave would not administer the anaesthetic himself. Instead, he asked one of the lady anaesthetists, one we both thought highly of, to take over.

Nothing was overlooked. Blood, in readiness for transfusion, was set aside. Every slightest detail was taken into account—including an electrocardiogram. There was no reason why everything should not go smoothly, unless, of course, there was a malignancy in the ulcer. I was well-prepared for all eventualities; at least so I thought! What happened, therefore, was all the more shocking.

Jerry Walker was put to sleep in the normal way while Dr. Storm and I were getting ready. A nurse fastened my sterile gown and was on the point of helping me with my gloves, when Dave, in a voice filled with horror, shouted:

Steer Clear of Relatives

‘George, quick, for God’s sake, his heart’s stopped!’

The words struck me like lightning. Heart-arrest during an operation—there was no greater tragedy that could befall a patient! Until only very recently it had signified certain death. Heart-arrest can set in during even the most trifling operation. Surgeons stand in such fear of it that every operating theatre prominently displays a coloured chart which shows in detail just what must be done in such an emergency.

I knew it too; but luck had shielded me all my surgical life from having to resort to these measures. Was Jerry Walker, Dave’s father-in-law, my friend—was he to be the first? ‘It can’t happen—I won’t let it!’ I almost screamed aloud.

I looked at the patient’s ashen face, beheld the stunned expressions of Dave, the anaesthetist and Fred Storm—and gripped the knife! In scarcely two seconds, I slashed the chest wall and, with only a few further cuts, the still heart lay bare before us!

My left hand pressed firmly on his chest, the other I thrust inside the patient’s body to grip the motionless heart between my fingers. The suspense hung ominously over the theatre, wrapping it like a shroud—it was unbearable! No one dared utter a sound; but each one must have asked himself the same question: would the heart respond?

I began to press and then to release the heart rhythmically. A few more interminable moments, then—sensing rather than actually feeling—I knew that the lifeless heart had restarted its beat!

A few irregular beats only—a pause—then, miraculously, a few more beats. Another pause—my hand continued its rhythmical movements.

Slowly, very slowly, the soft colour of life was pervading his body—his face. Now the blood coursed through all its vessels once again. Only then, after an eternity of five whole minutes, did we all dare to breathe freely again!

Steer Clear of Relatives

Hoarsely, as if every word were an effort, Dave asked: 'Shall we go on with the operation?'

'Yes, of course!' I replied resolutely—a determination I did not, in truth, feel, but rather forced myself into.

That gruesome performance is known to surgeons as artificial resuscitation. I cannot think of a word that could more aptly describe this feud with death, this battle for life! Recalling the dead to life—just that!

It would certainly be an anti-climax to go into details of Jerry Walker's operation now. No, the ulcer was not even malignant! When I had removed it, thus completing his operation, Jerry needed only two weeks in which to recover. As for me, it took me a good deal longer.

However, when Jerry left the hospital, no one would have dreamed that only such a very short while ago this man had trespassed for some seconds in the unknown beyond!

Lost Week-ends

It is very gratifying, no doubt very comforting, to be appreciated and esteemed not only by patients, but also by one's colleagues. Yet there are times, unfortunately, when the price for all this popularity becomes altogether too excessive.

I would be the very last to deny that being highly thought of is a source of great pleasure and satisfaction. It flatters one's ego and who would dispute that surgeons in particular do have sizable egos?

How I wish, just for this reason, that some surgeons would not insist on pretending complete indifference to such esteem. Yet they will go even further. With remarkable nonchalance, they will disparage their own talents—an attitude as uncalled-for as it is against human nature!

This coy reluctance to acknowledge their own ability is particularly dear to the hearts of English surgeons. A trend which could, I suppose, be merely an off-shoot of that well-known national characteristic of reticence and self-depreciation. Any outward show of feeling, love or admiration is strictly 'not done'. Thus belittling oneself must, as a matter of course, become quite the proper thing to do.

More often than I care to remember have I been told not 'to blow my own trumpet', when I betrayed what must have

Lost Week-ends

appeared as a little too much delight in my own skill! Yet nearly thirty years of practice amongst English surgeons still has not succeeded in dampening my innate Russian exuberance and I doubt if it ever will now.

American surgeons, on the other hand, are the direct opposite of their English counterparts. They are extremely extrovert in character; why, they actually take pride in proclaiming to one and all the 'stuff they are made of'!

I would dearly love to watch the faces of my English friends when they were told that in America George Sava was frequently considered too modest and humble—by American standards! Perhaps, without my realizing it, a tiny speck of this dear English virtue has rubbed off on me, after all! If that be the case I have cause to be grateful. For I shudder to think what the penalty would have been had I not remained at least a little reticent in finding favour in my own eyes! Had I been as self-appreciative as some of my American colleagues I would have found myself working day and night without a minute's respite.

Should any of my friends across the ocean ever chance to read this confession of mine, let me assure them here and now that at no time did I resent being called upon for professional services. On the contrary, had I not been called upon, I would most likely have developed an inferiority complex, or at least would have been far less happy! For I would have been sure that this meant they did not consider me able enough to come to their aid.

Therefore, let me hasten to assure Eileen and any others that I was genuinely glad to be of some help to them. Eileen, as it happened, was also one of the most charming nurses I had ever had the pleasure of working with. Possibly she believed that she was imposing upon me when on one of my week-ends off she asked me to operate on her varicose veins. Yet, in her case particularly, I considered it nothing short of a duty to come to her aid! For in some small measure I may

Lost Week-ends

well have had my share in contributing to the cause of her malady.

Eileen was young and pretty, possessing all the finest qualities to be found in American womanhood. In spite of being married and the mother of two small children, she worked as a full-time theatre nurse. In this way she helped to supplement her husband's modest earnings.

If I was inclined to take advantage of her and work her too hard at times, she had no one but herself to blame! She should not have been quite such an efficient and capable nurse. However, standing in the theatre for hours on end could hardly be called a treat; nor would I have recommended it professionally as a preventive measure against varicose veins.

So when Eileen started to complain of pains in her legs, my conscience too suffered pangs of remorse.

'Maybe you've got varicose veins, Eileen?' I ventured.

'Funnily enough, I really think I have,' she replied seriously. 'I've been meaning to ask you to take a look at them!'

'Jolly good show, the pleasure will be all mine!' I exclaimed in my very best British accent.

'Now, now!' she admonished me. 'A purely professional look, Dr. Sava!' I was amused to note a faint blush on her tanned cheeks.

'A nurse blushing—well, would you believe it?' I teased.

'I'm not,' she protested, her face a bright pink now.

Poor girl, she must have suffered considerably more pain than she complained of! Varicose veins had developed in both her legs and who can deny that this is a distressing affliction in a pretty young woman. For quite apart from the pain, they are not beautiful!

We discussed her problem professionally—Eileen being no novice in medical matters. In my opinion, I explained to her, it would be wiser not to inject them, but to have the veins removed by stripping.

'I'm glad you said that, because it's what I had in mind

Lost Week-ends

too.' Having said this, she hesitated for a moment, before she asked: 'Dr. Sava, would you do them for me?'

'But of course, my dear—any time!'

Again a slight hesitation. 'Would you mind terribly if I asked you to do them for me next Saturday?' Apologetically she added: 'I do know it's your week-end off—but, you see, it's also my day off. If you would do them then, I wouldn't have to miss so much of the time I'm on duty!'

Slicing an afternoon off the precious free week-end in a busy surgeon's life is not as trivial a matter as it may appear. One looks forward to those days; plans outings, dreams of lazing in the sun—dreams of simply doing nothing! Ah well, dreams would have to suffice until the next time!

At any rate, Eileen was so helpful herself, so uncomplaining when asked to do extra duty, that I felt nothing I could do for her would be too much of a sacrifice.

She had by then assisted me on similar operations at least a dozen times. On the other hand, she had assisted other surgeons also, on identical operations. None of these colleagues would have refused her, any more than I had done. Yet it was me she had singled out, and by doing so she had undeniably paid me a compliment! A ruined week-end: the price of fame—a small price admittedly, but then it was only very limited fame!

On our free Saturday, then, Eileen found herself upon the operating table, while I did my utmost to rid her of her painful, unsightly varicose veins. My week-end had certainly dwindled, but the pleasure I was to experience only a few days later more than made up for this 'lost week-end'. This was the sight of a new, more vital Eileen, fairly beaming with happiness. Her touching gratitude, too, could not have been rivalled by any amount of sunshine and idleness.

Eileen's veins were not to remain for long a solitary instance of a case that lost me a week-end. Soon after, they were joined by those of my lady anaesthetist.

Lost Week-ends

What a woman this lady anaesthetist was! Not only was she an excellent anaesthetist; she was also a married woman with no less than seven children. One might well have forgiven her if on occasion she had asked for time off to attend to her private life. Far from it—she would frequently insist upon doing more than her fair share of work. Never once did one hear a complaint even if she were called out of bed in the middle of the night. When duty called, all else would be put aside, and all personal considerations forgotten.

In Marianne's case, I did not bear any share of blame for her varicose veins. Anaesthetists are usually able to administer anaesthetics while seated, so even if the rest of her had to work overtime, her feet, at least, were spared. No, here the seven pregnancies as well as her numerous household chores were the true culprits!

When Marianne had first begged me to operate on her, she had mentioned that her veins had already been treated some years previously. 'Unfortunately, though, they didn't use your method of stripping, so now they've all come back with a vengeance!'

'Well, Marianne, as you know well enough, every surgeon has his own methods and ideas!'

'Don't you honestly think, then, that stripping is the best way of getting rid of those darned veins?'

'Naturally,' I smiled, 'I only adopted this method because I found it the most effective. But don't forget, I can only judge from my own experience—others may well disagree with me!'

'Sure, I understand! But tell me, can they still be stripped even though I've had the other treatment—or have I had it?'

We both laughed. 'Indeed, no, you haven't had it by any means! There's no reason why stripping cannot still be carried out. The only drawback is that it will certainly be a little more difficult now. The varicose veins will probably have to be removed in sections, instead of in one piece, which is the usual way.'

Lost Week-ends

'Good enough! And the final result, Dr. Sava, will it be just as satisfactory?'

'Of course, provided that you won't object to one or two extra cuts on your legs.'

'Ha, I should say not! What's a cut or two in comparison with those revolting veins of mine?'

Now came that ominous hesitancy I was beginning to recognize only too well. Then:

'Dr. Sava,' she ventured. 'Please, will you do them for me; or had you already guessed that was what I was after?'

My lack of surprise must have betrayed me, for, of course, I had indeed guessed just that. 'Well, shall I be honest?'

'Then you did guess!' She spoke for me.

'Let's say I had an inkling! Seriously though, I'll be glad to do it for you, you must know that, Marianne.'

'Lost week-end' number two, but with a slight difference. The Saturday I operated on Marianne was the one before Easter. My wife and two children had already left for England, to spend the Easter holidays with our two eldest, long since returned to their schools. I was thus deserted not only for that week-end but, what was worse, for the Easter week-end as well. So this time I was not cherishing the thought of my week-end off; the prospect seemed a bleak, lonely one.

Therefore Marianne's request for me to operate on her that particular Saturday—my first alone—proved very far from an intrusion. If anything, it was a most welcome escape from loneliness. For once, the price of my modest fame was exceptionally reasonable!

'Now, tell me, Marianne, what's it feel like being on the wrong end of the table for once?' I teased.

'Brrr!' was all she said in reply.

Dave, too, was not left out of the game. Amidst chuckles, he said: 'May I begin with the anaesthetic, Ma'am—or would you prefer to give it yourself?' Marianne only threw

Lost Week-ends

him a murderous look. Dave had insisted on looking after her anaesthesia himself.

'I'd love to get my own back on her,' was how he had excused himself with a huge grin. Yet I knew better! It was simply that, like all the rest of us, he was filled with respect and affection for this splendid, selfless lady anaesthetist.

With all of us in the best of humour, the patient included, we prepared for the 'onslaught'. I was about to apply the one method I had always found the most successful with varicose veins.

When Marianne was completely under, I began to remove the veins of her right leg. In cases where the veins had not previously been tampered with, the stripping is a very simple, straightforward procedure. A small, horizontal cut is made on the groin and the large saphenous vein is located. This is the vein which starts at the ankle and is the one that, together with its branches, becomes varicose.

Following that first incision, another smaller one is made just above the inner side of the ankle. It is here that the root of the saphenous vein can be found. Once it is opened, a long, thin, flexible wire is pushed upwards into the vein, until the end of the wire emerges from the incision on the groin.

This done, the surgeon ties the lower portion of the vein to the wire. The wire is then slowly pulled, until the whole of it, together with the vein, comes away. With no complications to cause delay, the entire operation can well be completed in no more than fifteen minutes, as Eileen's had been.

With our lady anaesthetist, however, the veins were slightly more reluctant to part company. Marianne had had her veins tied previously in two or three places. This hindrance compelled me to remove the veins in three sections.

As I pushed the wire from her ankle, it was obstructed by the knot formerly tied at the level of the knee. This forced me to make yet a third incision and extract the wire together with one portion of the vein. Leaping over the knot, up went

Lost Week-ends

the wire once more into the vein—to come to a halt somewhere in the middle of the thigh.

Again I resorted to the knife and pulled out another piece of vein. The last portion came out from the original incision in the groin. The operation on the other leg was almost identical and soon Marianne's intervention was completed.

When she was about to administer an anaesthetic for me some days later, it seemed to me that she was wearing an unusually short skirt. She must have become aware of my surprised glances, for, laughing in that particularly pleasant way she had, she said: 'Well, it's no good blaming me for showing off my legs, Dr. Sava! After all, it was you who made them fit to be seen again!'

'Who is blaming you, my dear? Didn't you know that I enjoy working with a lady who can sport a pretty leg?'

For the loss of my third week-end an entire family were to blame. This time my popularity had pursued me right across the mighty ocean, all the way from England. What is more, it was a popularity gained a long time back. Yet this time the price, quite literally speaking, was exactly right!

Many years ago I had operated on the daughter of a doctor friend of mine. It had been a plastic nasal correction. Afterwards, however, I had unfortunately lost touch with these people. Imagine my pleasure, then, when at the beginning of my employment at Merryville, I was to receive an invitation from a lady doctor in Los Angeles whose name I recognized as that of my lost friend. Overjoyed, I hastily picked up the phone to ring her. It is strange how one can learn to do without the company of a person for years, yet on re-discovering that same person one cannot bear to lose another minute in making contact!

'Irene!' I exclaimed. 'Is that really you?' On being assured that it was, I asked: 'What on earth are you doing in California?'

Lost Week-ends

‘Why, George, that’s just what I meant to ask you! I’ve been practising here for over ten years now!’

And that was how my friendship with Irene was once more put in motion. My wife and I went to her party and soon Irene returned the visit with her daughter. There was an endless amount we had to tell one another, not a little of it ‘shop-talk’!

The biggest surprise, however, was sprung on me during the Easter holidays that threatened such dismal loneliness. A car-load of people drew up in front of the hospital. They walked up to the reception desk and asked to see Dr. Sava. They readily admitted to having made no specific appointment but explained that, instead, they had a letter of introduction to me from Irene.

In her typical, direct way, she had written: ‘Dear George—This nice little family are personal friends of mine—they want their noses changed!’

‘I’m sorry if I let the cat out of the bag, by disclosing that it was you who changed Helen’s nose. Once that little secret was out, there was no holding them; no one but Dr. Sava would do, from that moment on!’

‘If this is going to upset your plans for the Easter holidays, just put it down to your skill, dear George!’

How like Irene! It was easy enough for me to read between the lines. What it really amounted to was that she simply could not bear to miss any chance of doing a good turn to a friend.

These people were obviously wealthy; their resplendent Cadillac and beautiful clothes were ample proof of that. Since, moreover, they were in no way connected with the hospital, these would be my own private patients. Thus I would be entitled to half the fees for the corrections—that was the contract. I had no family to enjoy Easter with; work was welcome—and the Easter egg this work would bring me, more than welcome!

Lost Week-ends

When Irene had stated in her letter that these people wanted their noses changed, she had made no grammatical error. Yes, the family really did want their noses re-shaped; not just one or even two of them—but every one, with the exception only of the father.

Mother, daughter and son, tired of having had so many years marred by unsightly long noses, had taken Irene into their confidence and had begged her for advice.

Their ideal was a nose such as Irene's daughter Helen possessed. On hearing this, Irene, friend that she was to this family as well as to me, saw no plausible reason why she should not tell how her daughter came to have this coveted nose. I was in California and these people longed for my services—why should Irene not please all concerned?

'We just couldn't believe our luck, Doctor! Just imagine—here we were, admiring Helen's dreamy li'l nose, never even suspecting that it wasn't the one she was born with! When Irene told us that it was a plastic correction—I nearly dropped! Then we all started plaguing her for the name and address of the doctor who did such a marvellous job. Well, when we got it out of her that you were right here on our door-step . . . ' The mother was quite beside herself with the thrill of being able to speak to the creator of Helen's nose.

'I plead guilty and I'm very glad you like it so much,' I replied, with what I hoped was seemly modesty, though their unstinted, uninhibited admiration for my work threatened to unbalance me somewhat.

'But I wouldn't say that I was exactly on your door-step, you know—not if you live anywhere near Irene, that is!'

'Sure thing, Dr. Sava, we're almost next-door neighbours. You don't call Merryville far from us, now do you? It only took two hours for us to drive down here; how much nearer can you get?'

She was a true Californian to be sure; and she was right! What were a mere hundred miles—who in California would

Lost Week-ends

allow them to obstruct the quest for beauty? Certainly no one worthy of the name of Californian! Travelling fifty miles to some restaurant of their choice would not even deserve a mention; then why not twice as far for a mission a hundred times more important!

There was little more to be said. These really were delightful people. And the notion of being able to construct a family nose rather tickled my fancy. What was more, there was not the slightest need for me to give them any assurance of my skill as a plastic surgeon; Helen was their living proof, they wanted no more!

When I translated my usual English fees for nasal correction into dollars, then multiplied these by three, none of the family, not even Dad, who was, after all, the banker, blinked an eyelid. I was to learn later that our English fees are but a fraction of those demanded by American plastic surgeons. Naturally, therefore, Irene's friends became even friendlier.

Mother, daughter and son were all operated on the same day. For about four days more they stayed at our hospital. They were ready to leave just in time for the holidays, sporting their brand-new noses!

My own Easter holiday I spent as a house-guest of Irene's. Far from the loneliness I had feared, I was surrounded by happy, friendly people in whose gaiety I joined only too gladly. When, furthermore, Irene told me that my efforts with the once long-nosed family had been much appreciated, I knew that all was right with the world.

'They're just thrilled, George! They simply can't stop looking at themselves. It's really too funny; each one is ready to swear to having the most beautiful nose!'

In all fairness, then, would anyone bemoan the 'loss' of this third week-end, when I had found so much in it that was enjoyable and amusing?

The Bitterness of Failure



In my long and varied experience as a surgeon, I have learnt one thing above all: neither success nor failure can ever be inevitable—indeed, there is an incalculable element in both. This realization I treasure and guard jealously. In return it has sustained me in many a predicament as well as having restrained me when in danger of becoming too full of myself.

It appears to be an accepted philosophy that 'nothing succeeds like success'. To my bitter disappointment this has proved a dangerously unreliable, misguided belief.

Another lesson gleaned from my profession, and one I try never to forget, is not to be cold-blooded or indifferent to other people's suffering. No matter how trivial the operation—if there is such a thing as a trivial operation—no matter how insignificant the case may appear, people cannot be regarded as the mere subjects of surgery. They are not machines with damaged or broken parts that simply need repair or replacements. It is only too easy for a surgeon to become impersonal; yet to my mind, at least, that is just what he should never be. Cool and collected, if you like, callous and indifferent, never!

'Patient' is not just another word for medical work; it stands for a human being in urgent need of humane help! At

The Bitterness of Failure

times our mission is a simple, straightforward one. At other times it is so complicated that even the most wise and experienced surgeon will be baffled at the unforeseen results following from what appeared at first to be a very minor operation.

Many times, when confronted by a patient suffering from an incurable disease such as cancer or advanced tuberculosis, I have been greatly tempted to inform the relatives, if not the patient himself, that the case is beyond help!

After all, with the indisputable evidence of tests and X-rays before me, all pointing to the same sad conclusion, would I not be justified in disclosing the futility of an operation where hope of recovery no longer appears to exist? Yet somehow, whether because of pity for this condemned human being, or because you yourself wish to remove the last, possible doubt—you operate!

It is most likely a long-drawn-out operation which may well take three or four hours. You frankly expect the patient to die at any moment and are amazed that he has the stamina to stand up to such an ordeal. Your relief is immense when at last the operation is completed and your patient is still breathing!

Of course, you know full well that his hours are numbered and that the poor man will be dead before the dawn of another day. The next day, however, having not only dawned but changed into night once more with your patient still clinging by some freak to life, sagely you reprieve him till the morrow. Still your patient continues to live, and in time not only does his life no longer hang in the balance—but he fully recovers! To you it is an enigma, against all the laws of logic and medicine.

Experiences such as the one I have just described have turned me into a persistent optimist. It is my firm rule, therefore, never to mention, either to relatives or patient, that in my opinion a case is hopeless. Deep down in my heart

The Bitterness of Failure

the hope that I may still be able to save my patient—or prolong his life—is never really extinct. If after all the inevitable happens, at least I have done all within my power and can live in peace with my conscience.

On the other hand, just as major surgery on a patient you had all but despaired of saving will sometimes lead to the most unexpected recovery, minor surgery may well lead to the exact opposite! For this reason, I never take so-called minor operations lightly. With all the incredible surprises the human body can spring on you, unless you are prepared for every eventuality you are bound at some time or another to receive a very nasty shock.

I was to suffer just such a shock with Pedro Amaraz. Its impact was all the more stark, since the whole thing was so utterly out of proportion—a savage bolt from the blue! Furthermore, it was to have consequences such as I had never before experienced in my life.

It had been a most tiring day. My operating session had begun with three simple cases which I cannot even recall in detail now. I had cheerfully anticipated the conclusion of my morning's duties by as early as eleven o'clock.

The casualty department and the doctors of the town, however, were of a different mind and soon shattered my illusions! Before the first patient had been wheeled out of the theatre I received a message. Three badly injured men were about to be brought to the hospital from the highway where their car had been involved in a head-on crash.

'Ah well, all in a day's work!' I consoled myself—the day of a surgeon, that is! Being human, I could not help bidding a rather sad farewell to my early lunch and afternoon's siesta by the pool.

It may well surprise my reader that I should be capable of such trivial regrets, when three people had met with a bad accident. But it must not be forgotten that this was a daily occurrence and until the surgeon actually comes face to face

The Bitterness of Failure

with the victims, he does not dwell on incidents as familiar to him as his very scalpel! On the contrary, he tries deliberately to shut out hospital life from his private existence—not always with complete success. Yet if he did not at least endeavour to lead some normally satisfying life outside his profession, how could he live at all? Or if he did survive, what kind of surgeon would he be—harassed, gloomy and frustrated as he must surely become?

I was not the only one at the hospital to be thus disappointed. Fred Storm, too, was aggrieved at this intrusion into his private arrangements. His grumble was more justified than mine, for his latest romance stood precariously on the verge of suffering a premature death. Yet Fred was a real 'trooper', a doctor first and foremost. Without another word, he threw himself into the job of assisting me in mending the broken bones of these men. But though he made no complaint, Fred's smitten expression was sad to see.

'Ah, never mind—we'll be out by two—she'll wait! You just phone the little beauty and change your date from lunch to dinner,' I advised knowingly.

'That's exactly what I've done, Dr. Sava. But to be quite frank, she wasn't what I'd call elated at the switch. She said she can't rely on me, 'cause I'm forever changing and cancelling appointments! Now, I ask you, is that fair?'

'Well, you mustn't blame her too much; after all, she's not here to see what actually does go on. Maybe, my boy, she doesn't trust you, eh?'

'Dames!' snorted Freddy. 'They're all alike!' And with that profound statement he seemed to dismiss the subject heroically and to concentrate on the far more serious business ahead. For just as men of medicine must have a life outside sickrooms and hospitals, they must also learn to shut this life out when necessity demands.

At about one o'clock some doctor from town, obviously worried that we might be sitting around in idleness, decided

The Bitterness of Failure

to come to our immediate rescue. This rescue came in the form of a strangulated hernia.

We swallowed some coffee, devoured a couple of doughnuts and rushed back to prepare for the lady with the hernia.

But this was by no means to be the end of it! The town's doctors had taken a particular fancy to us on that day. By three o'clock a new list had already been handed to us, with three more patients. One was a perforated gastric ulcer case; another, a little girl with dislocated shoulder—and Pedro Amaraz, with suspected appendicitis!

All three had arrived almost simultaneously, not long after we had unlocked the incarcerated hernia of the lady and had quite unashamedly uttered an enormous sigh of relief.

Still, hadn't we ourselves chosen this profession, and, for that matter, would we dream of exchanging it for another?

'Come on, Freddy, let's go and find out what clever diagnosticians our doctor friends are!'

'Yea, I guess we'd better! But I'll bet my bottom dollar that if ever their diagnosis was dead-on, it will be today,' said Fred with undisguised bitterness. 'It's a cinch that Lucie'll give me the "go-by" if I'm late again.'

As Fred had prophesied, these patients had been sent by capable doctors and it did not take us long to verify and agree with their findings. All that remained to be done now, apart from the actual operations, was to arrange the cases in the order of their urgency.

None of us were in the least uncertainty as to who had the first claim to priority. Undoubtedly it would have to be the man with the perforated ulcer. As every doctor knows, a perforated ulcer must be operated on immediately, certainly no later than six hours from the time of perforation, if the operation is to be successful.

Second place would certainly go to Pedro Amaraz's appendix. His was a case of acute appendicitis, still in its initial

The Bitterness of Failure

stages and therefore uncomplicated. We had come to this conclusion not only by means of physical examinations, but from the results of the laboratory tests.

This left our poor little girl with the dislocated shoulder to the very last. Sorry as I was that she would not be relieved of her pain for another two or three hours, there was truly little I could do, save to instruct the nurse to give her an injection if the pain grew worse.

As we made our way to the operating theatre once more, we found ourselves surrounded by a group of highly excited Mexicans. I soon gathered that these must be Amaraz's relatives and bade them a friendly good-afternoon.

An attractive young woman, with gleaming blue-black hair, introduced herself as Pedro's wife. With a dazzling white smile she asked me: 'Please, Doctor, you will take my Pedro first, won't you?'

I tried my best to explain to her that a perforated ulcer really was far more urgent and could not afford the risk of delay. 'I assure you, Mrs. Amaraz, that putting off your husband's operation for an hour will make no difference! His, after all, is only appendicitis in its early stages. I do hope you understand—the choice is hardly mine to make—I have no option whatever!'

The lady mumbled something in her own language and I continued on my way.

Thus we dealt with the cases as we had arranged. Opening the abdomen of the man with the ulcer, I was soon able to locate the perforation. This I closed with a few stitches and without trying to remove the ulcer. We then stitched up the abdominal wound. For the time being this completed his surgical intervention.

'We'll remove the ulcer when he comes to see us in two months' time, Fred,' I explained to Dr. Storm.

Now it was Mr. Amaraz's turn. He presented some problems, for being a very stout man, it was difficult at first to

The Bitterness of Failure

locate the inflamed appendix. At length, however, we succeeded in spotting it. When it was removed, Fred turned to me.

'We'd better let his wife see the appendix, Dr. Sava, before we send it to the laboratory. That way, she'll be satisfied that the hour's wait didn't do old Pedro any harm.'

'Just as you like, Fred,' I consented.

Finally, the little girl was brought in. She was an unspoilt, gentle child and had not complained once, though she had obviously been far from comfortable with her dislocated shoulder. Soon enough, I put things right for her, and with that the day's work came at last to an end. On reaching home, I sagged into a chair, closed my weary eyes and fell fast asleep—in front of a blaring television set!

Everything at Merryville took its normal course during the following week. Not one of the cases I had operated on that particular never-ending day gave cause for any undue apprehension.

Pedro Amaraz, indeed, must have felt so well recovered that as early as the third day after his operation he began nagging for permission to return home. Instead of trying to make him see reason, his wife was even more insistent.

'I'm sorry, Mrs. Amaraz—I simply cannot take the responsibility of permitting your husband to leave here before I myself consider him ready for release.'

'Sure, sure,' replied the good lady. 'Don't kid me, Doctor! You people always exaggerate—it's only a simple appendix, isn't it?'

I did not reply; had I tried to do so, I might have become angry. Yet on Pedro's fifth day at the hospital, after repeated pleas from both him and his wife, I came to the conclusion that under the circumstances Pedro had better be discharged the next day. I immediately phoned Mrs. Amaraz to inform her of this, and was treated to real exclamations of joy.

The Bitterness of Failure

That evening, drawing up a chair at Pedro's bedside, I tried to impress upon him just how essential it was for him to take every possible care at home. I told him also that he would have to return in three days' time for the removal of his stitches. 'Remember, Mr. Amaraz, if I had had my way you would have stayed here a little longer. Still, you should be perfectly all right so long as you take care of yourself.'

'I will, Doctor—I just want to go back home!'

Next morning, as soon as I had set foot in the hospital, Fred Storm rushed up to me in obvious agitation. 'Dr. Sava! Am I glad you've come!'

'What on earth's up, Fred?'

'Just come and see Amaraz right away, please! I—I don't like the look of him, one little bit!'

Losing no further time in useless talk, we hastened to Amaraz's bed. At sight of the man on the bed, however, I stood as if rooted to the spot! Was this the man I had left only the night before?

There was no mistaking the signs! That gasping for breath; the cold beads of perspiration; a far-away, haunted look and that frightening, bluish colour in the face!

'Embolism!' I exclaimed in horror. 'Fred, he's had an embolism!'

I heard the sound of my own voice and it was as if somebody else was speaking.

Embolism—a blood-clot which has obstructed the lungs—stands a very close second only to heart-arrest in its calamitous consequences. Yet Pedro Amaraz, that smiling, cheerful man of the previous night—how in heaven's name could this have happened to him? Why, the man was almost fit; he was leaving today! Accustomed as I was to shocks, this one left me stunned to the point of physical pain.

Major operations, in particular hysterectomies, will sometimes end fatally owing to embolism. It could reasonably arise also in an extensive resection of the intestine or stomach.

The Bitterness of Failure

Fortunately, however, in a simple appendix operation this is such a rare occurrence as to warrant safe dismissal from the surgeon's mind.

Now oxygen was rushed to Pedro's side; heart stimulants and anti-coagulants given—all of no avail! We were powerless, miserably thwarted in our every endeavour to save this man! There was just nothing, nothing we could do to stop him from dying practically in our very arms! We had been given no warning, so now there was no more time, or some surgical attempt could at least have been made.

So Pedro died. For some reason it was his destiny to end his life that morning, on that bed at Merryville Hospital—a reason I shall forever be at a loss to discover!

That day was indeed a black one for me. Pedro had been but a young man and had died from a relatively minor complaint. He was the very first patient I had lost in California! As it turned out, he was, thank God, the only patient I was to lose there.

This experience, apart from the devastating shock and pain it had caused me, was to become unique as well for a second reason.

When Pedro's wife and relatives came to the hospital, I wanted personally to convey my sympathy, instead of leaving this sad duty to the house surgeon. I believed that I might in some small measure be able to lighten the stricken family's distress.

If it was grief and distress I had anticipated from Pedro's kinsfolk, I witnessed it in no small measure! For I was to encounter nothing short of the most heart-breaking despair. The entire hospital—its nurses, assistants, not to mention myself—were given a show of uncontrolled Latin emotion. The hospital echoed with the laments and cries of this grief-stricken family.

For the second time on that wretched day I stood transfixed. Pedro's death had struck me deep and hard. Such

The Bitterness of Failure

heart-rending grief always affects me profoundly and here it shook me to the core!

These people were so inconsolable, so frantic. I was miserable that there was simply nothing I could do to lessen their pain.

Yet I tried desperately, with all the restraint I was capable of, to remain calm and unruffled, in order not to upset them further. After all, this was only their way of reacting to the shock of Pedro's death. Grief had been known to dement. In almost complete silence, therefore, I waited for the wailing to exhaust itself.

The death certificate I issued later that day was, to my amazement, rejected by Pedro's widow. We were notified by the authorities that Mrs. Amaraz was not satisfied as to the cause of death and had demanded an independent post-mortem. They were, of course, within their rights.

By law the post-mortem had to be carried out; a procedure which, under the circumstances, we welcomed. If there existed any doubts in the family's mind, it was just as well they should be dispelled, once and for all!

In due course a copy of the pathologist's report arrived at the hospital. The cause of death was confirmed as that of pulmonary embolism. Furthermore, it stated in detail that the operation had been carried out with all the necessary care and competence! One modest, comforting ray of light in what had seemed a wholly impenetrable leaden sky!

The Boy from Guatemala

The moment I entered the emergency ward I could tell that the boy just arrived by ambulance was in great pain. His mother, who had accompanied him, stood over him in a positively threatening attitude. Apart from the pain his broken arm must have caused him, the mother appeared also to be giving the child a rough time—if I was any judge!

She was a little woman and, as with not a few of her kind, her slight frame wholly belied her energy and force of character. In truth, she proved to be a veritable firebrand of South American womanhood. When I caught my first glimpse of her, her face was set and resolute—arresting in its white-hot anger. It was evident to me that this wrath stemmed not so much from the sight of her child in pain; but rather from the fact of the accident having occurred at all.

‘You naughty boy! Haven’t I told you a hundred times not to play rough games at school? Now look what you’ve done—that’s what you get when you don’t listen to your mother!’

‘But, Mother, why won’t you believe me?’ The harassed boy was very near to tears. ‘I was only practising on the school piano! When teacher called us, I turned and knocked my arm against the piano; that’s the honest truth—cross my heart!’

The Boy from Guatemala

Exhausted by his endless attempts at explanation, the boy lowered his head and closed his eyes.

Mother was adamant, however. 'Ugh, did one ever see such a child! Lying to his mother after all I've done for him! Now tell me'—and her head and arms came close to her son's face—'you just tell me, master-mind: how does one manage to break one's arm by knocking it against a piano, hm?'

I had now acted for some moments as a silent bystander to this little tragicomedy and thought it high time to intervene, before the squabble grew any more serious. 'Hello, you two, what's all the disturbance about?' I asked good-humouredly.

'Are you the doctor?' inquired the mother, quite determined not to be influenced by my mild manner.

As soon as I had nodded in reply she resumed her tirade of outraged mother's feelings.

'Doctor, this terror of mine, this wicked child of mine—though the Lord knows I'm ashamed to admit he's my son—what he really needs is a thorough good spanking! If only his father were alive! I've been too soft with him; that's the real trouble.'

She might have continued in this vein for hours yet, had I not asked: 'What has he done then?'

'Done? Why, Doctor, look at his arm! And all because he has to play with his ruffian pals at school, though I kept begging him not to!' Then suddenly her dark eyes filled with tears and her tone softened. 'He's supposed to be taking his scholarship for the Music Academy in a few days' time. How will he play the piano now? And he's so wonderful at it, too!'

'That's really a shame!' I could not help admitting. 'But you know, one can't really blame a healthy youngster for joining his friends in a good rowdy game—my children are just the same! By the way, how old is the young man?'

The Boy from Guatemala

'I'm fourteen, sir, going on for fifteen,' the boy told me proudly, indicating by his tone how very ancient and worldly-wise he considered himself. His deep, beautiful hazel eyes met mine. 'Honestly, Doctor, honest to God, I wasn't playing—I wasn't!'

'Right you are, son! Suppose you tell us exactly what did happen, then?'

I must admit that, however disposed one might have been to believe the boy, Juan Gomez's story was a little difficult to credit. His mother in particular, I felt, could hardly be blamed for disbelieving it so vehemently. Even I, accustomed as I was to the strangest quirks of the human body, was frankly suspicious. The boy was afraid of his mother and to avoid further punishment he had simply concocted this astute little tale—so I thought! Was it not bad enough to have broken your arm?

'Now, Juan,' I patted his pale cheek. 'You really can't blame your mother for not believing that story! To me, you look like an intelligent chap—well then, don't you realize that people can't just break their arms by knocking them against pianos? That is, unless you charged at it like a matador or someone else pushed you very hard!'

'Oh, what's the use, no one believes me,' whimpered Juan. 'I didn't charge at it and I wasn't pushed and I didn't even play with anyone—but no one believes me!' He had no way of reasoning with these suspicious dense adults and he made it clear that he was very nearly ready to call it quits.

'There, you see, Doctor?' Mrs. Gomez exclaimed in triumph. Whereupon her son turned his face away from us to the wall, with another deep sigh.

'What would you do with such a child? That's my reward, after nearly killing myself for him! I've skimped and saved every cent, ever since his father died—I haven't had a new dress in years—just so that he could go on with his piano studies. From the day his teacher begged me to let him carry

The Boy from Guatemala

on with the piano I've just about given up everything!' She looked at Juan and seemed to recollect something.

'O.K.—his teacher said he was a little genius. Sure, he plays the piano like a god, but he behaves like a little devil!' This selfless, miniature tigress could hardly conceal the smile playing around her thin lips, the first hint of one I had so far seen on her face. Yet instantly it was gone.

'The most terrible part of it all is that his scholarship's in less than two weeks. Now everything, everything I've done will be just wasted—thrown to the dogs!'

'Now, Mrs. Gomez,' I reasoned, 'it's tough luck on the boy, too, he's hardly enjoying this, I'm sure! Let's try to look at things more calmly.'

Two pairs of eyes flashed into mine, but neither one of their owners spoke for once.

'I will do all that I can to help; and let's face it, the examiners know as well as we do that accidents will happen—they'll understand, I'm sure!'

The eyes were still upon me, Mrs. Gomez's less worried, more tranquil now. Undoubtedly she loved this boy of hers a great deal and was perhaps beginning to feel a little conscience-stricken at her harshness towards him. In a changed, gentler voice she asked:

'D'you really think you could do something for my Juan, Doctor?' And for the first time she threw the child a look filled with love.

'Yes, I do think so, Mrs. Gomez. First and foremost, we'll have to see to his arm, of course. After that, I could write a letter to the Directors of the Academy and explain the circumstances of the accident. I'm positive they'll set another date for Juan's scholarship—and he'd better be good!'

After noting down all the particulars of the accident and its enigmatic cause, my chief concern now lay not with Juan's tale, but with his broken arm.

I had taken a liking to Juan Gomez. The enormous hazel

The Boy from Guatemala

eyes, which like his mother's burnt and penetrated yours when you spoke to him; the handsome, intelligent little face with the elegant, classical features—there was something about this boy! I had secretly resolved to try, as far as possible, to shield him from his mother and bear him out in his tale.

'Come on, amigo Juan, let's get that arm of yours photographed. That'll show me just how badly you knocked it against the piano!'

When Dr. Roberts, the radiologist, had developed the plates he called for me. The forbidding frown on my colleague's face, as I entered his office, was none too encouraging.

'It's broken, isn't it?' I asked immediately.

'It's broken all right—but that's not the worst of it by a long shot.'

'What then? D'you mean it's badly displaced?'

'No, no, the fracture itself is not an unusual one; it's in just about the middle of the humerus. But what really worries me is the condition of the bone—come, I'll show you!'

I am not a specialist in radiology, nevertheless it was easy enough for me to gather what Dr. Roberts meant. As he had remarked, the fracture was the general one; slightly irregular around the bone of the upper arm. The broken ends were in a fairly good position. Under normal circumstances I would have set the arm and placed it in a plaster-of-Paris bandage. Only under normal circumstances, that is, with no other difficulty presenting itself. That, unfortunately, was not the case here.

It was the unusual shadow detected in the bone that complicated this fracture. We spent quite some time studying the photos carefully, only to arrive at length at the one possible conclusion.

'Oh yes, Dr. Sava, there's not the slightest doubt in my mind—this shadow can't mean anything else: it's a growth of the bone!'

The Boy from Guatemala

'Ugh!' I winced at the thought of the shock this would cause Mrs. Gomez. And the poor child himself! 'That really is dreadful! Poor little Juan, now what's going to happen to him?'

'I'm afraid this could be extremely serious! I don't know, Sava, how much experience you've had with bone tumours; but from what I've seen, I can only say that at least sixty per cent of them are malignant!'

'Oh no, Roberts, that's just too awful!' The brunt of this intelligence was momentarily unbearable. 'Roberts,' I repeated, 'it's just not fair—that lovely, gifted boy! If it's malignant he'll have to lose his arm!' This time, I found it quite impossible to control my emotions.

Dr. Roberts must have felt not a little disconcerted by my outburst. 'Dr. Sava,' he said very quietly, 'I'm afraid it may well mean the loss of his arm; but you surely must admit—better his arm than his life!'

'Of course, no one can deny that; only in Juan's case the loss of an arm will mean also the loss of his chief interest and joy in life.'

Dr. Roberts still tried to pacify me. 'Sava, Sava, what's happening to you? People make a living with one arm, don't get upset! It's only his left arm, anyway!'

'You don't quite understand, Roberts, though I'm sorry if I've been a little over-emotional. In another boy's case it might not be quite such a tragedy, but Juan is, I am told, an exceptionally gifted pianist. What does one say to his mother—when the poor woman has given up everything to enable him to cultivate this gift?'

At last my colleague saw my point. He shook his head gravely. 'That's sad, that's real sad!' Then he brightened. 'Hold on now, you've got me at it too! Who says it's malignant, anyway? What the hell—here we go jumping to ugly conclusions!'

At this, I became somewhat more cheerful, too. Brushing my forehead with the back of my hand, I smiled shamefacedly.

The Boy from Guatemala

'You couldn't be more right, my dear friend. Forgive me, I'll go and see Mrs. Gomez!'

I dared not say much more to Roberts just then, I had already displayed too much emotion. But facing Mrs. Gomez was the moment I really dreaded! And, of course, the poor woman was absolutely shattered when the serious implications of our findings became clear to her. Now all traces of anger had vanished; all that remained were the sobs of a broken, bewildered mother—a small figure, completely helpless in the cruel clutches of destiny! She was accustomed to battle against poverty, against all normal obstacles life might present to her; but here she was at a loss. Her wings were being mercilessly clipped and she was left impotent and crippled.

When her tears had subsided a little, she was at last able to find words.

'My darling, my poor darling! I've been so unfair, Doctor; he's worked like a slave—he really lives for the piano. Ever since he was six years old he's loved his music and right from the start the teacher predicted great things. Oh, Doctor, I'll never be able to tell him this—it would break his heart if he thought he could never play again!'

'Whatever you do, Mrs. Gomez, for the time being you mustn't say a thing about all this to Juan! As I told you, it may well not be malignant—there's a fair chance still! Please, try not to upset yourself too much; for your own, as well as for Juan's sake!'

'But how will you be able to tell?' she wanted to know.

'My dear Mrs. Gomez, we'll be able to tell—that's one thing you don't have to worry about!'

'Yes, but how?'

'By my removing a small piece of the tumour and sending it for examination. The pathologist will be able to give us the final verdict.'

Later the same day, I asked for the boy to be brought to the operating theatre. He was put to sleep and I had only to

The Boy from Guatemala

make a small incision into the flesh of his broken upper arm to reach the bone. Then, with a small drill, I bored two holes into the bone and removed several specimens of the tumour. These were immediately sent to the pathologist with the urgent request for a most thorough investigation.

That night I refused with all the will-power and determination at my command to speculate on the outcome. What could I possibly achieve by it? If I was to help Juan, he would need a fit surgeon—my mind must remain a blank until the actual report arrived!

The report reached us the following morning. I can still clearly recall the shaky hands that gripped the envelope; the trembling fingers that held the letter; and above all—the frightened surgeon who dared not inspect its contents!

'Here, Fred!' I beckoned to Dr. Storm. 'You read it, I just can't, I haven't the heart! I don't know what's come over me—I think I'm growing too fond of the child!'

He took the letter from me without comment. After a few interminable seconds he exclaimed: 'Your worries are over—it's O.K.! You sure are a lucky guy, but I'm terribly glad—this means a helluva lot to you, doesn't it?'

'Then it's not malignant!' I cried. 'Thank God! Yes, it does mean a good deal to me—but it's mother and son that I am so happy for; now their lives can start again!' I slapped Fred on the shoulder in a sudden bout of high spirits. These are the moments one treasures, the moments when Nature relents to show that she can be as kind as she can be cruel!

My energy knew no bounds. I ran to the phone and with pounding heart I told Mrs. Gomez the wonderful news. The report had stated, quite definitely, that there was no evidence at all of malignancy! We had crossed one hurdle—the chief one, to be sure, but there was still a great deal to be accomplished now.

The nature of Juan's tumour was of the so-called cystic variety. This is a softening of the bone rendering it almost

The Boy from Guatemala

jelly-like and therefore terribly fragile. A bone such as this can break at the faintest touch; and we had not believed the boy! What wrongs one can do to people! Obviously the slight knock against the piano had caused the fracture; an accident that could only be regarded as a blessing in disguise. Had it not occurred, the tumour would have continued to enlarge, thereby affecting a far greater portion of the bone.

The problem now confronting me was a very serious one still. How could one prevent Juan's arm from becoming crippled? For by the removal of the tumour the arm would eventually become two or three inches shorter. This could hardly be compared to the calamity of losing the arm altogether, to be sure; but for a professional pianist it was very far from good enough!

No, some means had to be found which would enable me to leave Juan's arm unimpaired, perfectly normal. I wanted to see those long, slender fingers moving over the piano keys easily, naturally—I wanted it desperately! How could I achieve this ambition—what means could I resort to?

This problem came up for official discussion at our next surgical conference. There was no need for undue haste now. The arm, for the time being, was placed in a sling, and Juan himself was presented to my colleagues at the meeting, by his amigo Sava. I asked them to examine his arm and study the X-ray plates our radiologist, Dr. Roberts, had taken.

Unanimously it was agreed that the tumour must be removed and one or more pieces of healthy bone inserted in its place. This, then, was what had to be tackled—successfully!

The day after the conference, Juan was to find himself in the operating theatre once more. Only this second time it would be a lengthy, far more demanding session.

I began by laying bare the entire tumour of the arm. The muscles were separated and kept apart so that I would meet with no hindrance in reaching the bone.

The Boy from Guatemala

With scrupulous care, the whole of the tumour was scooped away from the healthy bone with a special sharp spoon. Soon the jelly-like substance vanished and we could discern the sound ends of the bone.

The removal of the tumour left a gap, however, of over three inches and it was this fissure we had now to fill with another portion of healthy bone—in other words, a bone-graft. Here two possibilities were open to me—either to obtain material for the graft in one piece from another part of the body, such as the rib or the fibula of one of the legs; or to take small pieces of bone from these same sources as well as from the pelvis and with the small pieces to pack the fissure tightly.

It is the second method which is generally favoured by English surgeons. For we believe that it results in better healing and that the small pieces can more easily be modelled to the shape of the missing bone. I thus decided to adhere to the method I was familiar with.

With a second incision in the groin, I removed small sections from the iliac crest of the pelvis. Once satisfied that there was now sufficient material, I closed the pelvis incision.

Now commenced the fitting of the assembled pieces of bone into the gap of the humerus—very much as one would the pieces of a jig-saw puzzle!

Tightly we packed them together, and with the help of my assistant I was able to close the muscles and skin over them. The position of the arm was controlled by X-rays, after which the arm and chest were cast into plaster of Paris.

There was little more now for us to do—save wait! Juan was kept in bed for several days and given antibiotics to prevent any form of infection. A few days later he was permitted to leave his bed, with the strictest orders to exercise meticulous care—in case he should suffer even the slightest knock against any object or person.

The Boy from Guatemala

Three weeks later the first cast was removed and the stitches from the skin-incision taken out. A second, lighter cast was now applied.

The changing of casts continued for four more months. Each time a cast was removed, the healing stages were recorded by X-rays. So far, all was progressing very much as we had hoped it would.

Juan, highly intelligent and sensible lad that he was, did exactly what he was told; always helping, never obstructing us in our task. His grateful mother had difficulty in finding sufficient adjectives for her incessant outbursts of gratitude and praise for all of us.

The authorities of the Academy of Music had meanwhile been kept constantly informed of Juan's progress. We could only hope and pray that they would exert a little further patience.

The final check was made five months after the initial accident. No more casts were now necessary; instead, the arm was put in a sling and Juan was ready to begin with physiotherapy.

This had turned out to be a happy case for me—one in which tragedy had not only been averted, but had magically, step by healing step, been transformed into joy. The ultimate pleasure, however, was caused by a letter from the Academy.

The letter granted Juan generous time in which to fully recover and practise—his scholarship was to take place six months hence. A definite date was mentioned in the letter, which put an end, once and for all, to Mrs. Gomez's worries.

Unfortunately, work prevented me from attending that examination. But I was informed by telegram, as soon as the result was made known, that Juan had climbed one more rung up the ladder of his cherished career!

Any morning now, I expect to read in the newspapers of a recital given by the young maestro from Guatemala.

A Taste of Hell

It was a glorious Sunday. A Sunday beckoning to one and all to savour its golden beauty: its buxom arms spread out in readiness to enfold you in lavish embrace. One of those days when the intense joy of living courses through your veins the moment you open your eyes. All the trials and disappointments, all the pain and misery—they are no more! The sun has taken them away, dipped them in gold and now they emerge transformed into new gilded hopes and dreams.

For me, as it was one of my treasured off-duty Sundays, it meant rest and relaxation as well as some more serious meditation. A day to be spent with the family either at home in the garden, or visiting one of the numerous beauty-spots of California in my Lincoln Continental.

‘That’s exactly what we’re going to do—we’re going to enjoy this day to the full—really make the most of it,’ I pondered contentedly as, greeting the brilliant sunshine, I came out of the picturesque little church from mass.

My wife and two children had only just returned from their visit to London, so now there was no longer any fear of loneliness. Could one imagine anything more appealing than the prospect before me? A light lunch in the garden,

A Taste of Hell

dressed in easy informal attire. Then the family would step into my car, still gleaming new, and away we would go! Into the mountains, through the vales and dales; carefree, in love with every moment—gloriously happy!

There were still so many things to see, so many hidden places still to discover. But in my Lincoln there was no limit to what we could accomplish in one single afternoon. We might even find the time for a quick refreshing dip in the sea. This was my day!

Slowly, inhaling the scented air, we all made our way homewards. Gregory, feeling no doubt that he had endured the snail's pace of 'those grown-ups' long enough, began to skip ahead as we came in sight of our house.

'Catch me, Dad!' he called, and obeying my son's orders I ran clumsily behind the small, agile figure to catch up with him just as he opened the gate. I grabbed hold of him and swung him round and round. 'Put me down, put me down!' he squealed in glee. Little pink hand in large, veined surgeon's hand, we walked up to the front door.

'Telephone, Daddy!' Gregory announced merrily. 'Can't you hear it? I can!'

Yes, I could hear it now, that unwelcome intruder. 'No, not today,' I grumbled, more to myself than to my son.

'Shall I go and tell them that, Daddy?'

'Dear me, no, Greg, that's not what I meant!'

Six days of solid, uninterrupted work; surely it was enough? I wasn't even on call today! But why the panic? After all, we did have friends who might wish to see us. I was so intent with the possession of this day—this Sunday—that, like a miser, I would have liked to tuck it away lovingly in some secret hideout where no one could rob me of it!

Before I had even unlocked the front door the phone had stopped ringing.

'They will ring again, if they're keen to see us!' I told Jane, who looked slightly disappointed; perhaps visions of

A Taste of Hell

some moonlight barbecue had already captured her imagination. Invitations in California always brought with them the added charm of the unexpected; rarely were they dreary little indoor gatherings.

Lazily I stretched out on the settee, emitting in the process various sounds of satisfaction for Gregory's amused benefit.

'Aah, ooh—that's better—a real tonic for my weary old bones!'

Titters from my last-born.

'What's so funny, may I ask?'

'You are!' More titters.

'Can I help it if I'm getting old?'

'How old are you, Dad?'

'None of your business!'

'You always say that when I ask you!'

'How old d'you think, then?'

'Well, Mummy said you were thirty, but I think she was joking—you're not really that old, are you?'

Before I could reply, though in truth I was sorely at a loss, the phone rang once more. It was Dave Meyer's agitated, troubled voice that startled me.

'Thank God, George, at last I've caught you. I've been ringing for ages!'

'What's the matter, Dave? I've only just returned from church.'

'George, we're in a dreadful fix here!' Recollecting himself suddenly, he remembered to add: 'Oh, I'm so sorry to disturb you—and on your only day off, too! But, so help me, it's absolute hell here—please come right away!'

Dave was, I knew, the last person to exaggerate a situation at the hospital, let alone panic. Was sickness not a part of our lives? If he said it was hell, then something very out of the ordinary must have occurred.

'Why, Dave, whatever's happened? Of course I'll be there!' Pausing for an instant to shield myself from my son's

A Taste of Hell

non-stop tickling onslaughts on my unshod feet, I asked Dave hopefully: 'Will after lunch be all right?'

'George, you don't understand! We're simply inundated here with the most shocking casualties!'

'No need to say any more, Dave, I'm coming right away!'

A disappointed wife and two perplexed children waved me goodbye as I started the car. Not to take me to the mountains where my fancy had previously wandered—but to Merryville as quickly as I dared drive.

In less than ten minutes I drew up in front of the hospital with a screech of brakes. It was only too evident that something was badly amiss. Policemen, police cars, ambulances and private cars were swarming all over the grounds!

When at last I had found a parking space, I hurried a great deal faster than when I had chased Gregory, almost to collide with Dave Meyer at the entrance. I could not recall when Dave had looked more exhausted; his face was drawn and yellow.

Stopped dead in my tracks, I stood there beside Dave, mesmerized by the spectacle unfolded before my disbelieving eyes. Where exactly was I—what year was this? For suddenly I was back in war-torn London in its grimmest hours of the blitz! This scene before me—surely only the ravages of war could have caused it!

All around me, in the corridors, in the emergency wards, in the waiting-rooms, in the offices, on the door-steps even—bodies! Mangled, distorted men: some writhing in agony, others stretched out completely unconscious. Then there was the blood, melodramatically smeared everywhere: blood on their faces and clothes, crimson puddles on the ground!

Yet I knew it to be a peaceful, sun-drenched Sunday morning in Los Angeles in the year 1959—not a black, leaden night in the London of 1940!

The sun's rays played a weird game with this grim mass of suffering humanity: mocking their pain, licking curiously

A Taste of Hell

at their blood. Night would have been more fitting here. Especially since the bright sun depicted all the more clearly the black faces of the wounded.

Dave's voice dragged me out of my hallucination, forcing me back to Merryville, California. 'Now you see what I meant!' The horror in my eyes must have spoken for me.

'It's unbelievable—just unbelievable! Like a battleground! How in heaven's name did this come about?'

'A head-on collision of two lorries taking negro workers to the fields!'

'It's unbelievable!' I could only repeat, and continued to repeat to myself over and over again, as I rushed away to change.

It was just noon when I began to operate. About seventy-five negroes had been involved in the collision. Five of them were past any help we could give—dead on arrival! Four, with only minor scratches and bruises, were already being tended by Fred Storm and the other house surgeon.

To Dave and myself fell the most serious cases—no less than thirty-nine men in all! How then can I possibly describe the next thirty-six hours?

You will remember that Dr. Meyer had a contract with the town to deal with all accidents within a radius of ten miles. This contract laid down that only surgeons on the staff of the hospital were entitled to do the work. Naturally, in drawing up this proviso, no one had envisaged such an inundation as we were now facing. Such a major disaster, indeed, is something that, mercifully, happens only very occasionally.

When I started on the first of the wounded, the clock had struck twelve. This first case was a middle-aged negro; his age more easily judged by hair, neck and limbs than face. For his face was so badly injured as to be beyond identification. Only the pair of desperately frightened, stunned eyes could be distinguished from the *mêlée* of torn flesh and broken bone.

A Taste of Hell

Don, the surgical technician, handed me the X-ray plates taken a few minutes earlier. It was hard to credit that these bony fragments had once been part of the jaw!

For two hours we cleansed and debrided the flesh lacerations and tied the severed arteries. We did our utmost to manipulate the bone-fragments into the shape of the upper and lower jaws.

Temporarily we were able to hold them together with the aid of a few wires. This would make the job of restoration easier for the maxillary surgeon when he took over later on.

As for the man's teeth, these were simply non-existent; unless you cared to count the one or two stumps grotesquely visible through the swollen gums!

Ninety minutes later another man with multiple fractures of both legs replaced the first on the operating table. Now I switched from plastic surgery to orthopaedics. By means of metal plates and rods, the thigh bones were riveted into position. Once the flesh-wounds had been sutured, the man was encased in plaster of Paris from his chest to the toes.

Thus it continued; one bundle of shattered flesh and bone followed by the next. Each as bad and frequently a great deal worse than the one before! By the time the dawn of Monday came in sight we had dealt with more than twenty cases; the majority of them broken limbs and flesh-wounds.

I had switched from plastic to orthopaedic surgery with monotonous regularity time and again! At eight o'clock on the Monday morning I managed for the first time to snatch half an hour for rest and a hot drink. Had my half-hour's respite been delayed much longer, I do not doubt that I would have collapsed at the operating table!

My energy somewhat restored, I returned to the theatre, to find my next patient already upon the table. Had this night not steeled me twenty-fold by now, my disgust at the merciless damage caused by accidents would have asserted itself all over again!

A Taste of Hell

Before me, this time, lay a young man. Both his arms and collar-bones were fractured. But that was by no means all. One of his legs appeared to have been partially stripped of its skin with almost demoniac force. Here, both plastic and orthopaedic surgery were called for, on one and the same person.

First of all we attended to the fractured arms and collar-bones. Only then could I begin operating on the torn leg—not, however, before I had made absolutely certain that no major arteries were severed. Had that been the case, there would have existed no other alternatives but to amputate the leg altogether. Fortunately the principal arteries were intact and we could thus go ahead with our attempts at restoring the leg to normal.

It required not a little patience and severe concentration to identify the ends of the torn muscles and then to stitch them together. Now came the skin—first, what was still left of it. For here and there pieces were flapping loosely as if held by threads! These had to be joined and stitched together—a very long and exacting job. Now came the skin that had been ripped off during the accident—or, rather, the replacing of this lost skin on the raw, peeled parts of the leg as well as on a large area on the inside of the thigh.

It was unthinkable that this should be left unattended! I therefore took a piece of skin from the sound leg and grafted it on to the bare areas. I could only hope that it would take on such an unhealthy base.

God be praised for Chaim and Fleming! If it had not been for their discovery of penicillin, this patient and at least half of the others would not have lived to tell their tale!

By the time Monday was over, I had for a while to desert plastic and orthopaedic surgery altogether and to resort to abdominal surgery. An elderly negro who had at first appeared to be one of the least injured, had been retained at the hospital merely for routine observations. His general

A Taste of Hell

condition had seemed satisfactory, yet all at once fate had intervened. The old man was not to be let off this easily after all!

Whilst sitting up enjoying a hot drink, he had suddenly felt faint and had collapsed. It was about twelve o'clock by then and I had just put the final touches to the skin-graft when a startled nurse burst in to tell us of the man's collapse.

By that time, of course, surprise was no longer a word that existed in my vocabulary. Not, at least, until sleep had soothed away some of the gross horror of the last twenty-four hours. The old negro's rapid and irregular pulse, pale face and cold beads of perspiration could not possibly be mistaken—internal bleeding.

What must have transpired was that one of his internal organs, most likely the spleen, had ruptured. Yet the shock, and the low blood-pressure accompanying shock, had prevented immediate bleeding. Hence the deception of his seeming well-being.

A night of rest, however, with drugs to calm his heart, had mitigated the shock and thereby raised the blood-pressure. This had resulted in the re-opening of the tears in the spleen, or in whichever was the injured organ. The inevitable had followed.

Internal bleeding—collapse; I had no other alternative. This case demanded instant attention. The next person on my list—a fractured hip—would have to concede his turn to this emergency.

Two hours of labour, with suspicions of ruptured spleen confirmed. By removing it the man's life was saved—a fairer reward for two hours' toil I could never claim!

Another quick switch to orthopaedics. The broken hip of the patient who, through no choice of his own, had had to concede his place of priority, was pinned. Five more patients were seen to, by which time night had once more set in!

A Taste of Hell

It was no longer necessary to devise any more new techniques or methods; no other different types of injuries appeared. The last patients were exact replicas of the fellow-sufferers who went before them. For this reason, we managed to speed up our tempo, taking only half of the time we had earlier required—so practised and skilful had we now become!

At eleven o'clock on Monday night yet another man—a head-injuries case—was wheeled out of the operating theatre. His had been the thirty-eighth operation and the final one. So the end had come, even here, where no end had seemed in sight!

Yet had I not mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that there were thirty-nine major cases? Had we lost one in the process; had one taken flight? No, nothing of the kind. There was, indeed, a thirty-ninth!

Young Abraham Harry Washington Jones was our prize patient. Therefore I have devoted an entire chapter to his story. A few fleeting words would never suffice to convey the glorious moral of this modern fairy-tale!

From whichever angle you choose to regard it, his case can be considered nothing short of a miracle. A combination of stamina, a stubborn refusal to part with life—and modern surgery, skilful if you like!

For the moment, however, Jones lay on his bed in one of the wards. I, on the other hand, had had more than my fill. If my little son had asked me now how old I was, I could in all truth have replied—a hundred years! I felt as if half a century had elapsed since I had entered the hospital—thirty-six hours ago. Thirty-six hours of gruelling, exacting toil! A labour of love, to be sure; yet nevertheless a labour of nerve-racking tension. Being forced, as I had been, to witness for thirty-six hours, without respite, the agonies of my fellow-creatures, had given me a true, unadulterated taste of Hell!

The Abraham Harry Washington Jones Story



The tale of Abraham Harry Washington Jones is unique for a host of reasons. Had I not been the surgeon on the case, but had merely been told of his injuries, I fear that I should have refused point-blank to credit that any human being could survive this onslaught—no matter what his stamina! Not to speak of the numerous major operations he underwent and braved courageously. Yet in this case I had been the surgeon; there was no question of disbelieving what I myself had performed and witnessed!

In spite of the terrible misfortune which had so cruelly singled him out, Abe, as we all came to call him, was blessed with one supreme advantage! He had at least been born into the twentieth century. For only in this present age is there such an abundance of first-rate surgical means at hand, able to be called upon without delay.

In telling the story of this modern miracle, I must not omit mention of the part so touchingly played by his mother. I cannot describe her, for any description of mine would most certainly stray grossly from the truth. I cannot describe her face because, to me, hers was a beauty of the spirit that only a Leonardo da Vinci or someone with equally sublime talent

The Abraham Harry Washington Jones Story

could portray. Hers was probably the most beautiful face I was ever to encounter; and yet let me admit that I never actually saw her face at all! Looking at her, I saw only what she stood for—what she personified—and therefore I found her beautiful. That she was a coffee-skinned, middle-aged negress with thick lips, broad nose and crinkly hair, I knew, but did not see!

If ever a woman stood for all that was civilized and naturally good and gracious, it was this little coloured saint. If ever a woman could lay bare the cruel sinfulness of colour prejudice—again it was the humble Mrs. Jones. A purer heart will never beat beneath the most rosy-hued chest!

There she was, either squatting or kneeling by Abe's bed, her eyes seeing what none of us were able to see, riveted not on the mortally-sick youth at her side but on some image that belonged to her alone. Her hands she kept constantly folded over her breast. She was obviously in prayer, yet so modestly and inconspicuously as not to be obtrusive.

Whatever modern surgery and our own endeavours did for the body of Abraham Harry Washington Jones, his mother's fervent belief and unconquerable trust in God must have done a hundredfold more for his soul. The actual battle for Abe's life had already begun on that Sunday afternoon when, on surveying the thirty-nine injured men, I had to decide dispassionately on their order of precedence.

Each, of course, desperately needed help and each was to receive it. Deciding which victim could stand waiting for his operation just that little while longer than his neighbour—this was, in itself, a hateful task for a surgeon. Above all, it was a demanding, serious task!

In all honesty, from the seriousness of his injuries, Abe should have been the first. Yet I left him to the very last! At first glance this will undoubtedly appear a most illogical decision, but experience has taught me that it was the only correct one.

The Abraham Harry Washington Jones Story

The damage to his body was so grave as to make it clear to me that, instead of adding to his chances, immediate surgery might actually cut off altogether these same terribly slender chances of survival.

Any operation, no matter how slight, is in itself a momentary injury to the body of the patient. It produces a state known as surgical shock. In this case, surgical shock added to the shock already received from his other injuries would have been quite beyond even Abe's powers of endurance.

'No,' I had decided. 'This patient cannot be operated on now!' If he should be dying, why add to his torture? Yet if a faint spark of life still persisted, I would have to feed this spark—and feed it by other means than instant surgery! That is why Abe became the last of my thirty-nine patients—instead of the first one, as would have been his right!

On his arrival at Merryville the young negro was unconscious. The first step, therefore, was to dress his superficial wounds gently; make him as comfortable in bed as possible and sustain and kindle that infinitesimal spark of life still within him.

During the thirty-six hours which to me had spelt interminable work on the other patients, Abe was constantly being administered blood transfusions and oxygen, as well as being injected with heart stimulants.

Sometime during the Monday, the ward sister came to inform me that Jones had regained consciousness. 'He looks a little better, I think, Dr. Sava!'

'Really, Sister—why, that's splendid!'

My interest immediately aroused, I rushed between operations down to his ward. I examined him to find out for myself whether the sister's impression had merely been wishful thinking.

But no, she had not imagined things! Abe's condition was definitely showing signs of improvement; however minute these signs, nevertheless he was improving! Only now could

The Abraham Harry Washington Jones Story

I permit myself to examine him, in the certain knowledge that this would not further endanger his condition. On the whole, however, the examination did little to help raise my spirits!

Quite apart from the multiple cuts and bruises, I must own that I felt choking despair at the sight of his mutilated limbs. His left leg was practically torn to pieces—the ankle almost entirely severed, the ends of the broken bones protruding from the wound. Both bones of the leg were fractured; equally so the thigh.

The other leg, as well as being broken, had most of its muscles and skin pulled away. I gave instructions for the blood transfusions to be continued and prescribed antibiotics. What a battle this would be! I could only be thankful, though, that there still was a battle to be fought.

As I turned to go, I perceived for the first time the tiny, bent figure pathetically hunched in the corner by the top of Abe's bed. A figure which was to become as familiar to me as the sight of the sick man himself. A vision I was to see each and every day and night, throughout the time of our frantic struggle for the youth's life.

Her eyes seemed barely aware of my own or anyone else's presence. When they did shift, it was to settle for a brief moment on the face of the sick boy. So gentle and tender was this glance at her son, so touching in its profound love, that it forced a lump to my throat. It was as if she feared that even a look of less lightness might hurt the outrageously punished body of her boy.

'You are Mrs. Jones—Abe's mother?' I whispered softly.

Startled from her reveries, her eyes gradually wandered towards mine as she rose.

'Yes, Doctor, I'm Abe's mother!' Those unfathomable eyes still upon mine, she pleaded more than asked: 'Will Abe—he will live, won't he?' After a slight pause she added:

The Abraham Harry Washington Jones Story

'He's my only child—the best a mother ever had!' This was not said dramatically; just a simple, honest statement.

What was I to reply? 'We're trying very hard!' I told her. 'We're doing all we can—you do know that, Mrs. Jones!'

'I know it—and may God bless you for it!—Doctor, could I—may I stay here with him? I promise I won't disturb him or anyone; I—I—just want to be here with him!'

'I'm sure no one will object. You stay here if you like, only do make sure you get some rest yourself! Will you promise me that?'

'I promise you, Doctor, and thank you very much.'

She had not even mentioned her purpose for staying by Abe's bed—so private and personal was her contact with God.

In the course of Monday night Abe's condition continued its slow, steady progress. When I examined him once more on the Tuesday, I felt that delay was no longer advisable. It was now that we had to begin with the operations!

Abraham Harry Washington Jones—victim number thirty-nine on my list of that never-to-be-forgotten holocaust—was wheeled into the operating theatre. For nearly six hours he was under the knife!

First the broken, lacerated ankle was set, reconstructed and sutured. Then came the fracture of the leg; then the thigh. All these fractures had to be reduced by the open method: cutting through the flesh, isolating the bones and fixing the broken ends with metal plates and screws. At last work on the left leg was completed and we could concentrate on the right one.

Painstakingly we reconstructed the muscles; but not before applying plates and screws once again to the fracture of the thigh. Both legs were now immobilized in a cast of plaster of Paris. I then called for the X-ray technician and asked for a control examination.

The Abraham Harry Washington Jones Story

As if guided by some unknown power, I mentioned to the radiologist that I would also like Abe's chest X-rayed. Actually there was no apparent reason for my request. For it was the one part which betrayed no external signs of bruising or injury. So I would have been justified if, for the time being, I had chosen to ignore this part of his anatomy.

Yet, subconsciously, I simply could not credit how with a body as damaged as Abe's, his chest should be let off without a scratch; the obvious, because of its lack of complication, seemed incredible! Whatever my motive—the fact remains that I asked for an immediate chest X-ray on Abe.

When the plates were returned to the theatre and I scrutinized them under the lighted screen I almost broke out in a cold sweat! 'Oh God!' I exclaimed in my horror. Both Dave Meyer and Fred Storm moved over to me and looked at the plates. Both were soon to draw back aghast, filled with the same emotions as I.

What we saw would have discouraged a man a great deal more stout-hearted than myself! For it was all there—utter collapse of the left lung with a portion of the diaphragm torn asunder! The chest cavity itself was filled with the organs of the abdomen. This must have resulted from a sudden immense pressure upon the abdomen, thus forcing the organs of the abdomen into the chest.

'It doesn't seem possible!' muttered Dave. 'How can he possibly still be alive? What in God's name is keeping him alive, George?'

'It's as much of a riddle to me as it is to you!' I had to admit. 'How little we still know of the mysteries of human existence!'

'But—he must die—can you see any other way out?'

I looked at Dave for an instant, before I said: 'Operate, Dave!'

He shook his head in doubt. 'Surely he can't stand any more punishment! An operation of this sort would be certain

The Abraham Harry Washington Jones Story

to kill him!' And as if hoping for contradiction, he added: 'Wouldn't it?'

I looked once more at the plates still held clasped in my hands. 'It might—it well might, Dave! But with this boy there's no telling! From what I've seen of his stamina for the last three days, nothing, and I mean literally nothing, would surprise me!'

Still engrossed in the plates, I now stated: 'We're going to try—we're operating! We have nothing to lose; he is going to die, anyway, if we don't operate!' Dave and Fred met my eyes in silence, then nodded.

It was, of course, out of the question to follow with a chest operation immediately after the six hours' ordeal Abe had just been subjected to. I therefore ordered him to be taken back to his bed and for his routine treatment to be resumed.

That night, nothing could have dragged me away from the hospital. I had to be near Abe, had to be at hand should his condition deteriorate. What measures, in truth, I could or would have taken, I cannot think! I knew only that I wanted to be there—I knew also that sleep that night at home was out of the question.

There was, however, little change in Abe's condition during the night. Every time I tiptoed up to his bed his mother was there beside him, and I knew that she was praying. Somehow, whenever I came into her vicinity I felt a strange comfort surge through my being. Cynics may scoff; I myself might scoff in my more frivolous moments—yet what I felt then I cannot refute!

Several untouched cups of coffee stood on the little bedside table. I do not recall ever having seen any food pass her lips. Though she remained motionless as a statue, one nevertheless felt her presence strongly. Once I did notice how she stretched out a hand and fleetingly touched the brow of the lad. For a split-second only—as if to reassure herself that life was still there!

The Abraham Harry Washington Jones Story

Wednesday morning—and Abe was on the operating table once again. He still had difficulty in breathing and had not yet fully regained consciousness from the previous operation.

Before making the final preparations for this fateful intervention I somehow felt the urge to speak to Mrs. Jones. I told myself it was to calm and console her; more likely, as I now believe, it was to become infected with a little of her own quiet courage!

This time, as soon as she saw me, she rose and came towards me. If anything, she was even more tranquil and serene that morning. It was she who now addressed me.

‘You’re going to operate again, aren’t you, Doctor?’ she whispered in her lilting, soft Southern drawl.

‘Yes, my dear, we must. We discovered yesterday that Abe’s chest is badly hurt, too.’

She merely nodded—nothing could shock or unbalance her by now. ‘God will guide you, Doctor, to save my boy’s life—I know it!’

How beautiful this woman was! Her acceptance of any situation, her trust and confidence—they were infectious. Suddenly I, too, felt that the final outcome of Abe’s struggle might really be a happy one; suddenly I felt easier, less heavy-hearted at the difficult task ahead of me.

I took the small hand in mine and pressed it for a moment. ‘I’m truly glad you feel this way, Mrs. Jones!’ Then, with one last glance at her face—the face I was never to see—I walked away to commence work on the body of her son.

It was thoracic surgery that was called for now. I had no cause to fear any unforeseen complications; whatever I might encounter after opening the chest, I was certain I would be able to cope with it!

The chest was opened through the seventh intercostal space—this meant cutting between the seventh and eighth

The Abraham Harry Washington Jones Story

ribs. Once inside, my hands tried to unravel the coils of intestine and stomach that had become so dislodged from their normal position in the abdomen.

Gradually, the organs were unwound and pushed back through the opening of the diaphragm into the abdomen. To facilitate this task, a rubber tube was inserted through the mouth into the stomach, so that we might be able to aspirate all the contents of stomach and intestines.

This done satisfactorily, we now had to reconstruct the torn diaphragm—in itself no trivial undertaking! Piece by piece the fragments of the diaphragm were brought together and joined one to another by means of cat-gut stitches.

Three hours had already elapsed. Not infrequently, I stole furtive glances at Dave who again administered the anaesthesia himself.

Quite frankly I dreaded asking him outright about the patient's condition. Any doubtful, let alone discouraging reply now, I feared, might wipe out my confidence. Abe was still breathing—that much I knew! How precarious his condition might have become I preferred not to know just then. At any rate, I had no choice now; I had to finish what I had set out to do.

The end of the operation was at last in sight. I assured and reassured myself that there was no bleeding and that all the organs were in their correct positions. Then I asked Dave to force air into the collapsed left lung.

What satisfaction to watch while the small dark piece of flesh—all that the lung had become—began gradually to expand and to creep stealthily forward, a creature with a life of its own! The dark colour soon retreated until it faded entirely to give place to a soft, pink hue! I touched the lung gently.

'No more shocks!' I pleaded silently. 'Please God, just no more new complications!'

The Abraham Harry Washington Jones Story

The lung itself, however, was healthy. No injury of any kind made itself apparent. So its collapse had obviously been caused only by the invasion of the abdominal intruders!

‘Thank God!’ I muttered again. ‘Thank God!’

What now remained to be done was to bring the divided ribs together and to unite once again into one whole the separated muscles and skin of the chest.

A small rubber drain was placed inside the chest and fastened trimly to the edge of the wound. Later, once the patient was safely back in bed, it would be connected to a suction machine. This would ensure that no fluid could collect in the chest-cavity. Were this to happen it might result in the lung’s collapsing for a second time.

The fight for Abe’s life still raged tense and fierce! Only now we were no longer on the defensive, we had become the stronger opponent—the attackers!

Abe was alive and Abe was to remain alive. His bones were to mend: slowly, gradually, bone by broken bone. His wounds were to heal and his bruised flesh was in time to become normal. Death had fumed and snorted, bent on prematurely pilfering the young negro’s life. Yet death had been beaten down out of sight—to spit her cruel curses elsewhere!

We had all had our various small parts to perform in this victory. The nurses had given unstinted, endless service, comfort and understanding. The house surgeon, untiring at all times of day and night, had been at the ready with blood transfusions and injections. Dave’s anaesthesia was never anything but outstanding. And I suppose Tom’s, Dick’s and Harry’s techniques in abdominal, thoracic and orthopaedic surgery had played their part! Thank heaven that I had at least been capable of making fair use of their teaching; for I had combined my own European training with the best of what I had gleaned in America. It was this which

The Abraham Harry Washington Jones Story

had constituted the surgery performed on Abraham Harry Washington Jones!

Yet to my mind the strongest crusader, the real victor, was the most silent, least assertive member of our small army—that fragile, quiet figure at Abe's bedside, that frail negress with the staunch courage of the early martyrs! Much as I advocate and believe in practical aid, nothing will ever convince me that it was not that mother's prayers which saved her son above everything else, that it was not her faith which moved the Almighty to hear and answer.

Ingratitude, by Any Other Name!

It was a hot, sultry afternoon in late August. The air was tired and listless. There were only two children in the large house and the heat made them more moody and fretful than usual—especially young Lou! Susie, who was eleven, tried hard enough to amuse her younger brother but she too was growing bored. It was a full-time job, constantly to invent new diversions for the little boy!

The children had been left entirely on their own that afternoon. Father was as usual working at the factory in the nearby town and mother, on an impulse, had gone to do some shopping. This was nothing out of the ordinary, for mother frequently had impulses to go on lengthy shopping sprees and was in the habit of leaving Lou in Susie's charge. It was the girl's repeated duty to see that he did not get up to any more mischief than normally—which, in itself, left a fairly large margin.

On the afternoon in question, one of the two children, more than likely Lou, had had a brain-wave.

'Why not let's invite Hank, Joe, Carol, Belle, Rosa—shucks—some of our pals, anyways! What say, Susie?'

'Yeah, why not?' ('Anything,' the harassed Susie must have thought, 'to stop you pulling my hair for a bit!')

Apart from the hair-pulling diversion, Lou had already

Ingratitude, by Any Other Name!

smear her books from top to bottom with ink. Swinging to and fro on the lounge-curtains, after his last achievement, he had landed on the floor with a crash—an enormous piece of mother's best silk curtain flapping gaily in his hand. The other children would certainly serve to distract him from conjuring up any more mischief and thus give Susie the chance to enjoy herself a little too!

They set off, hand in hand, to collect their various 'pals'. This was a very simple procedure for there was hardly a street corner where some pal was not to be found. Since Lou counted practically every little boy or girl with equally high spirits as a bosom pal, the only problem was whom not to bring along! However, the house was spacious and theirs to fill—so why worry? In no time at all, therefore, it was fairly bursting with a colourful gathering of lusty American youngsters, all yelling and screaming at the top of their none too small voices. In even less time the furniture was marked, dented and soiled by numerous small feet and hands!

It was glorious fun! First they looked for hidden treasure—merely ripping off two of the chair-covers in the process. But why stay in the house when there was a large garden at their disposal and a splendid hose to play havoc with?

Hank, the eldest boy there, grabbed hold of the long hose and volunteered generously to give a free shower to all who came within reach. Should some child be reluctant, however, to make appropriate use of his service, he would soon put matters right by chasing him; thus making quite certain that everyone was well and truly drenched. In the heat the water dried soon enough, so the fun could start all over again.

Lou, who admired the big Hank immensely, sought desperately for some way of impressing the brawny lad.

'Shucks, what'll I do?' he tortured himself grumpily, while throwing a large pebble at Belle, who greeted it with an almighty screech.

'Lay off, Lou, will ya—that hurt!'

Ingratitude, by Any Other Name!

'Aw, you're chicken—all gals are!' Lou told her, while searching for an even larger stone which he promptly hurled at little Belle. Ready for the chase he knew would ensue he took to his heels as fast as he could and with yelps of joy ran into the house with Belle close on his trail.

She caught up with him just as he flopped onto his parents' bed in exhaustion.

'I wanna do sumpin' excitin',' he told his girl-friend. 'A'm bored!'

'Yeah, nuttin' to do!' agreed Belle.

'Jeepers, Belle, A'got it!' And he leapt up in glee. Belle rushed to his side and asked:

'Well, what'll we do then?'

Amidst titters he told her. 'We'll give 'em the scare of a life-time—good idea?'

'Natch'—on'y how?'

Pulling the counterpane off the bed, Lou showed her.

'Wi' them, dopey—cain't ya jest imagine—A'll be a real ghost in them sheets! Gee, Bellie, will ya help dress me up good?' Belle warmed to the idea.

'Mm, yea—c'm on, then, le's make a real swell job of it!'

So they took one of the large white sheets and Belle helped Lou to wrap himself in the sheet and made him look as ghostlike as she knew how.

'Gee, Lou!' she exclaimed when she had done. 'Ya look real scarey!'

'Golly Moses, don' A though?' agreed the small boy, as he surveyed himself in his mother's long mirror.

As they crawled stealthily on all fours into the back-garden once more, the two children giggled with delight when they saw how their friends were frantically drying themselves from yet another of Hank's 'duckings'.

'Now!' whispered Lou to Belle.

'Catch ghost, catch ghost!' called the girl on cue, pointing to the gesticulating figure of young Lou, artistically wrapped

Ingratitude, by Any Other Name!

in the sheet like a large cocoon. The children, quick to react to any new attempt at amusement, all pretended to be thoroughly frightened. Amidst shrieks and shouts, they shied off in all directions.

What exactly occurred after this, no one was ever able to tell me. Whether it was Lou himself or one of the others who was responsible, is therefore still a mystery. Somehow or other, one of the children managed to lay hands on a box of matches, struck a few of them and—accidentally or otherwise—set fire to Lou's sheet.

In a matter of seconds the poor boy was surrounded by flames spitting at him from every corner of the sheet. The flames grew wilder; soon Lou was burning like a torch! His agonized screams terrified the others to such an extent that instead of coming to his rescue, in a panic they scattered and fled.

However, there was one who did not desert him! It was his sister Susie who eventually came to his aid. Once she had recovered from the initial terror, with admirable presence of mind she turned the hose on Lou and then wrapped him in a thick blanket. At length the little eleven-year-old managed to extinguish the flames. But by then the damage was irrevocably done!

When their mother arrived home, she must have felt faint at the sight of her little boy. Instantly she grabbed the phone and dialled for an ambulance. At five o'clock that afternoon Lou was brought to our hospital. By that time he was in a coma from the profound shock and excruciating pain he had undergone.

That day, as it happened, was my half-day off. Thus it fell to Fred Storm to give First Aid. Fred naturally did all that could be done in the circumstances. First of all he gave an injection of morphine against the pain, then sterile dressings over the burnt areas of the body. Finally, intravenous saline infusion in order to replenish the fluids the child had already lost.

Ingratitude, by Any Other Name!

This time, since all necessary measures had already been taken, I was not summoned to the hospital. For the time being Fred had done everything possible and felt justified in waiting until morning for me to take over.

When I entered the children's ward the following day, a man and woman leapt hastily from their seats and rushed towards me. One of the nurses must already have informed them of my arrival and now they were impatient to speak to me. Frantically, the woman gripped both my hands. Her hot tears flowed freely and she was very near to hysteria. 'Oh, Doctor, please—for God's sake help us! Do something—anything—for our darling Lou!' At this point she was choked by sobs. While her husband tried to comfort her, she exclaimed:

'Doctor, don't let him die! Oh, Lord, just don't let him die!'

Slightly startled at this outburst by the unknown woman, I turned to Fred Storm. The latter soon enlightened me that these were the parents of the burnt child they had admitted last evening.

'I see,' I said softly. 'You're little Lou's parents'—endeavouring meanwhile gently to free my hands from the woman's tight grasp.

'I'm going to examine him now. Do please calm yourself and wait outside. As soon as I've completed my examination I promise I will call you!'

The sight of the child in the bed was a most distressing one! He was still suffering from shock and had not yet come out of his coma. It was heartbreaking to hear his shrieks of pain each time I was forced to touch him. As carefully as I possibly could, I slowly took stock of the extent of the burns.

The entire right side of his head, including the ear and half of the neck, was raw: third-degree burns without doubt! The right shoulder, the whole of the right arm, half his chest and back, right down to his middle, were as black as pitch. The skin had simply shrivelled like so much parchment, far

Ingratitude, by Any Other Name!

more resembling the skin of a mummy than that of a living creature!

The left side of the boy had fared better. It appeared to have been left unharmed, apart from his left hand and wrist which were also raw from third-degree burns.

It was remarkable that the small child should have survived these injuries, for we surgeons know only too well what a killer the loss of fluid can be! As a rule, whenever more than a third of a patient's body is burnt, even if the burns should be only first or second degree, that patient cannot survive—the loss of fluid being too great. Here we had a child of six with certainly a great deal more than a third of his skin affected, and moreover most of the burns were third degree!

This child required exceptionally intense and exacting treatment. Only specially-equipped hospitals with expert staff, trained specifically in this branch of medicine, I felt, could really supply this. Our own hospital, although not lacking in generally well-trained staff and modern equipment, nevertheless did not have these particular requirements at its disposal. I decided, as I went into the waiting-room to speak to them, that I must make the position quite clear to Lou's parents.

Before doing so, however, I asked if they could give me details of the actual cause of this misfortune. It was then, amidst constant tears and sobs from the mother, that I at length discovered what had happened. This young woman, with her red, swollen eyelids, her tears and rending sobs, was certainly an object of pity. Yet there was nothing for it but for me to be forthright with her—these parents were entitled to know the truth—much as I regretted having to be the harbinger of it!

Without undue pessimism, there was still no doubt that Lou was gravely ill and it was this I had to tell them. Even more, I had to make his parents realize that for the next few days, regrettably, I could not vouch for his life!

Ingratitude, by Any Other Name!

On hearing this even the father, who until then had remained outwardly calm, broke down and wept unashamedly.

'Your little boy needs specialized attention; he requires every kind of equipment available, if he is to have the best chance of recovery,' I explained. 'Of course we would do all in our power here, but in my honest opinion he should be transferred, as soon as it is advisable to move him, to the children's hospital in Los Angeles. It really is the finest-equipped hospital for a case such as this!'

'Oh, Doctor—oh no,' they protested in unison. 'We don't want him moved to another place,' cried the mother. 'If—if—dear God forbid—something should happen to him, we would at least be near him; please understand, Doctor!'

Besides, as they both emphasized, they had already heard that I was a trained plastic surgeon. They were convinced, therefore, that an American plastic surgeon could do no better than I. 'Doctor,' said the father, 'if Lou—if he doesn't pull through I swear we won't blame you or anyone at Merryville. We'd like him to stay here; somehow we've got a lot of confidence in you! Sure, you can only do your best—if it doesn't work out, then it is God's will!'

'Naturally, we'd do all that was humanly possible here, but as I've said before, I'd still feel happier if Lou went to the children's hospital! Still, if you insist even now that I've explained the position to you—as far as we're concerned you need have no worries! Whatever we can we shall do for your little boy, that I promise!'

For the next few days we fought to counteract the shock by alternately giving Lou blood-transfusions and saline. His condition, if not dramatically improved, at least did not deteriorate further. We were able eventually to drag him out of the shock state.

At least I could now definitely tell his parents that Lou's life was no longer in peril. Unfortunately, however, my duty

Ingratitude, by Any Other Name!

also compelled me to give them information bound to dampen their spirits. For their son stood in great danger of losing his right arm. The blood vessels of that arm were sorely compressed by the withered skin, thus preventing the free circulation of the blood. If something drastic were not done, the arm would inevitably become gangrenous—amputation would then be the only alternative.

One can never predict reactions from people—particularly from those stricken with grief! I had quite expected Lou's parents to overlook the main issue—which was, after all, that his life had been spared—in the pain the news of the threatened amputation would bring them. Yet so effusive were they in their gratitude to us all for having saved the child that I felt almost embarrassed.

'Even if Lou does have to lose his arm, Dr. Sava—we'll never, never forget all you've done for him,' the mother assured me with touching sincerity.

'You've saved his life, Doctor—we know that, and we'll bless you for it for the rest of our days!' agreed the father.

Until mid-September we literally slaved over Lou. Even if his parents were prepared to accept the loss of his arm—I was not! I wanted, if it were possible, to save Lou's arm. And this I did at length manage to achieve.

To ease the circulation of the blood, I cut the whole of the parched skin lengthwise and removed it entirely. This, of course, left the arm entirely bare of skin; but as there was no longer any compression, the circulation improved rapidly and danger of gangrene was eliminated.

From now on, although the work would be tedious, it would merely be a matter of routine, with no further big issues at stake. We still had to cleanse all the burnt areas and rid them of the infection for ever present in this type of burn.

Then we could begin the grafting of healthy skin from other parts of the body. In particular, the skin of the thighs lends itself favourably to covering these affected areas.

Ingratitude, by Any Other Name!

In children, when they are as badly hurt as Lou was, it is sometimes possible to perform temporary skin-grafting by using the skin of a near relative such as the father or mother. This is generally done at the commencement of the treatment. For the skin-graft will then stop excessive loss of fluid and can well save the patient's life.

Skin taken from another person in this way, however, will not take permanently. It remains for only a few weeks and then inevitably starts to slough off of its own accord. Yet these first few weeks frequently suffice to achieve the all-important result.

Naturally, at the outset, I had considered adopting this method for Lou, when his life was still in danger. I had also mentioned it to his parents. Although they did not turn down the idea, I was nevertheless glad not to have to resort to such drastic measures. Even a short period in hospital would have prevented their attendance at work, thus depriving them of their livelihood. Fortunately, as things turned out, Lou recovered by means of the ordinary measures we took—and that was all that mattered!

By the middle of September, about four weeks after the child's admission to the hospital, I judged that the time was now ripe for the first stage in the grafting process. I knew it would be impossible to cover all the affected area at one session. This would have required an enormous quantity of skin which the child simply did not possess.

The first stage had therefore to consist of grafting skin over the more important parts of the body—parts such as palms of the hands, fingers, wrists, elbows and arm-pits. These form the most vulnerable areas and if left unattended are liable to heal into dreadful deformities, due to contraction of the scars.

It was these areas, then, which first and foremost we had to cover with new skin. I selected the boy's right thigh and from it took a number of small sections of skin. With these I

Ingratitude, by Any Other Name!

managed to cover both of his palms, both wrists, his right elbow and right arm-pit. My only prayer was that the grafts should take and the child be spared from becoming a cripple for life.

A few days later we removed the bandages. What immense relief and satisfaction when we realized that every piece of newly-grafted skin was healing.

The child would undoubtedly still be slightly deformed—but what a far cry this was from what might have been! His hands might well remain scarred, but at least he would have normal use of them. His elbow and arm-pit, too, would now certainly be neither stiff nor deformed.

It is hardly necessary to mention the thrill and relief of his parents at this splendid step forward. It goes without saying, also, that their gratitude was profuse. A great victory it certainly was, but still far from final! We were still confronted by a raw neck, chest, and back, which had to be covered with new skin.

I was preparing to proceed with this second stage of the grafting, when something quite independent of Lou's case occurred. While having a drink with Dave Meyer one evening, he told me, in the course of conversation, that he had been offered a very high price for his hospital and was tempted to accept the offer.

'Naturally, George,' he assured me, 'the prospective new owners are most anxious to retain your services as chief surgeon. As a matter of fact, they're prepared to increase your present salary!'

Much as I appreciated this, I had to point out to Dave that the matter required a good deal of reflection.

'I enjoy working with you, Dave, and with Storm and the rest of our little team! I'm not so sure if I'll feel the same way about this new boss! You know me well enough by now to realize that, above all, I have to feel at ease and confident in the people I work with!'

Ingratitude, by Any Other Name!

'Well,' Dave had suggested, 'why not take two weeks' holiday—you're certainly due for them anyway—and use them to think things over? When you get back, you can give us your decision.'

'D'you really think that you'll sell, then?'

'Yes, George, I think it's time Katie and I took a rest from this nerve-racking responsibility!'

'That I can understand! And that holiday you were talking about—it's a jolly good idea, you know!'

I was sorry, of course, that once more I stood at the parting of the ways with a good friend. Nevertheless, I was far from downhearted. All my patients were doing well, their treatment all but completed. It was only little Lou who still required further attention. And he would have to be transferred to the children's hospital.

The next day I told his parents that through circumstances outside my control it was now inevitable that Lou should be transferred. I also impressed upon them that there was no longer any danger whatsoever. His life was assured, his arms had been saved; he needed only further grafting and two or three months of careful hospital treatment.

Their gratitude for my interest and devoted attention to their little son was intense. Reluctant as they were to take him out of my care, they understood that there was no other way open to them. Since I was leaving, they were prepared to have him moved to the children's hospital.

I rang the hospital at Los Angeles that same day to arrange for Lou's transfer. I spoke to the surgeon in charge, telling him that I would send a report along, giving full details of the treatment Lou had received up till then.

The following morning the little fellow, now quite his cheerful self, bade me a fond farewell and I shook hands with his parents. His mother was in tears once more—only this time they were tears of relief and gratitude. She must for a moment have recalled the manner in which this now

Ingratitude, by Any Other Name!

smiling child had arrived at Merryville. No wonder she was genuinely touched and grateful, I reflected.

They both vowed to keep me informed of Lou's progress, no matter where I might be.

'You're a lot more to us, Dr. Sava, than just a doctor! You're our friend and we'll never forget you,' they told me repeatedly.

I admit that I accepted this show of friendship and appreciation as my fair due. As my reader knows, I do not believe in false modesty and I was overjoyed that I should have had such a big hand in the saving of the child's life.

To complete this tragic tale, I must be forgiven for skipping somewhat ahead, both in time and place.

It was now seven months later. I had returned once more to my home in London. One morning there was a knock at my front door and an American gentleman was shown into my study. Explaining that he had come from the American Embassy, he handed me a copy of court proceedings and informed me that it was his painful duty to warn me that should I fail to offer voluntary testimony I would be subpoenaed in court as a witness.

I gave my sworn testimony in the presence of the American Consul and two lawyers, one being my own and the other the plaintiff's. And the case? Believe it or not, it was instigated by none other than Lou's parents!

They had sued Merryville Hospital—all the doctors and nursing staff concerned—for wilfully harming the child, causing unnecessary suffering and bodily injuries. The hospital was being sued for damages—to the tune of no less than one hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

I gave my sworn testimony before Consul and lawyers. Yet I stubbornly refrained from making any personal comment whatever; my heart was too heavy. In America, I knew, hospitals were highly insured against just such proceedings; so I could be sure that Dave would not have to suffer financi-

Ingratitude, by Any Other Name!

ally. But there can be no insurance against the sense of personal disappointment such indictments bring to doctors and nurses who honestly feel they have accomplished all that could possibly be done for a patient. This, I am afraid, is an aspect of medical practice in America to which I could never become entirely acclimatized.

I am happy to say that in this case the hospital was able successfully to defend the action, and all concerned were cleared of any imputation of blame.

'Darby and Joan'

The day I met the first of two of the most lovable characters in my case-book was memorable not solely for the lady's appearance on my medical horizon. For that day was also to mark a vital change in my life as a Californian surgeon.

It was the beginning of September. The morning was one such as only California could conjure up—California at its superb best! The sun was warm, but no longer so hot that it rendered work an unpleasant burden. The clear blue sky was visible for endless miles; for on this day it was completely devoid of the infamous Californian smog. To tell the truth, throughout my stay in California, I never could quite make out what all the fuss was about when people complained of 'that dam' awful smog! Newspapers were always full of disparaging remarks about it; radio and television announcers cursed it. The only reason, as far as I could see, which might have caused this public outcry was a slight haze in the air obscuring the brightness of the sun and causing one's eyes to smart very slightly. I swear that was all! But then, few Californians have ever experienced autumn or winter in London or the Midlands—so how could they possibly know the true meaning of mist and fog?

Yet on this particular day there was not a trace of smog. Already on the point of leaving for the hospital, I could not

'Darby and Joan'

refrain from standing for a while at the open french windows. Spellbound, I gazed into space, enveloped by the comforting warmth and the scent of the flowers from the garden. There was really no need to rush, for there had been little activity at Merryville of late. No doubt the sudden slump in work was caused by the rumours that had been circulating for the past few weeks. Everyone seemed to have heard about the impending changes in both the hospital's administration and its medical organization.

For my part, however, I was not unduly troubled by this respite. After all, a little leisure after constant hard work was hardly unwelcome. I had still barely recovered from that 'taste of hell' the negro disaster had brought me, and considered this unexpected rest as almost a gift of the gods.

Nevertheless, I felt it my duty to leave home at my usual hour of eight. This was a hospital—one never could tell from one minute to the next what might crop up! Just as I was about to close the front door behind me, the telephone began to ring. A call at this early hour did not surprise me since it had frequently occurred in the past. The reception clerk at Merryville had orders to notify me the moment an emergency case was brought in.

The surprise, therefore, was not the actual phone call, but the voice greeting me from the other end of the line. For I soon recognized it as that of Dave Meyer himself.

'Not another misfortune like that last one, surely?' I could not help worrying fleetingly. 'But why would Dave phone me at this time of the morning?'

His first words, however, were sufficient to put me at my ease and allay all fears of an unwelcome spurt of work. For in his usual friendly tone Dave said:

'What are you supposed to be doing at the hospital this morning?'

'Oh, nothing much; nothing special, anyway!' And I told him, 'One appendix and one hernia—I think that's the lot!'

'Darby and Joan'

'Perfect!' he exclaimed. 'I'd sure Fred Storm can see to them, don't you agree?'

'Of course he can, but why shouldn't I do them?'

'Because, my dear George, I have taken the liberty of officially giving the two of us the morning off!'

'Mm, that sounds like good news! Ahem—what's the catch?'

Dave began laughing at my last question, though I failed to see its particular merits as a joke. Amidst guffaws, he managed to say at last:

'What's the catch, he says! You've just about hit the nail on the head—you see, pal, you and I are about to go on a little fishing trip!'

Just for a moment, I was so astonished that I stood dumb-founded with the receiver in my hand.

Dave must have interpreted my silence as reluctance, for in a disappointed voice he now inquired, 'I thought you loved fishing, George, don't you?'

Now I suddenly awoke to the joke I had earlier made so unintentionally. Roaring heartily, I told Dave: 'Now I see the joke! Do I love fishing—you bet I do! It was just such a surprise that it knocked the wind out of me!'

'Swell! Then you get on the phone to Fred straight away and ask him to take over those two operations. I'll pick you up in about twenty minutes, O.K.?'

'Very much O.K., Dave, thanks. I'll be ready!'

As it happened, the twenty minutes only just sufficed. The various instructions I had to give to Dr. Storm took up almost fifteen of them, so that I had only five minutes left in which to make a quick change into something suitable for the fishing expedition ahead.

As good as his word, Dave's car roared up to the gate, punctual to the minute. I took my seat beside him, banged the door with gusto and off we sped to Long Beach, where Dave kept his motor-boat anchored. And so it came about that for one morning I became a Californian fisherman!

'Darby and Joan'

Unfortunately I am not much more than a novice where fishing is concerned. Much as I relish the peaceful, soothing effect it has upon one, I have never found the time to take it up seriously. Thus the first half-hour in Dave's boat had to be devoted to his teaching me the ABC of the proper use of the fishing-rod.

I wonder if there is a more enchanting way of whiling away a morning than by gently floating across the Pacific Ocean, a couple of miles out from the shore—and hundreds of miles away from the hectic everyday world! That day the Pacific Ocean really lived up to its name; not a breeze stirred, not a wave rippled. Endless calm, endless beauty! Time was unimportant here; twentieth century or fifteenth—there was nothing except the boat itself to betray what era we had strayed from. It was almost unreal in its vast perfection. The sea, silken smooth, had the crystal clarity of a giant looking-glass used solely for reflecting the golden splendour of the sun and the azure innocence of the sky. It made an unforgettable moment, stirring just because of its unsurpassed tranquillity. One is inclined to forget in the mad hubbub of modern life what peace there is still to be found in the gentle arms of nature!

Dave and I lounged on deck and cast our hooks lazily, with the bait trailing carelessly behind. Four hours of quiet happiness.

And what of the catch? In this part of the Pacific Ocean it is something that surely even the best, most expert of fishermen can only dream about! Short of experiencing it for oneself, it is hard to credit! After that fairy-tale day, I shall never again dare to doubt the tales of fabulous catches fishermen will sometimes astound you with—if, that is, these tales refer to the Pacific Ocean!

In those four hours, and with all my lack of experience, I was to hook no less than sixteen three- and four-pounder fish in all! The whole procedure was simply too good to be true;

'Darby and Joan'

it was for all the world as if the fish were vying with each other for the honour of taking a nibble at the line of Merryville's chief surgeon. Not that they spurned the line of the hospital's owner by any means. In fact, we were forced to stop by mid-day or the boat might well have capsized with its enormous, fishy load. There were literally piles of different kinds of exotic fish in every corner—a morning's catch to be proud of for two medical fishermen.

With the assistance of the Mexican deck-hand we loaded our booty, stacked in two huge boxes, into the rear of the car. All the way home we kept a jealous guard on our prized treasure, thrilled as two schoolboys.

By then Dave had already divulged to me the second surprise he had planned. Of course, I knew that the hospital was about to change hands. What I had not known, however, was that Dave had arranged a meeting between the new owners and myself over lunch that same day.

What a frantic rush the moment I reached home, to clothe myself in attire more seemly and appropriate to the sober atmosphere of a fashionable Los Angeles restaurant. I could hardly risk the embarrassment of seeing the raised eyebrows at the spectacular entrance of a portly foreign surgeon—in blue jeans!

An hour later Dave's car drew up outside our house once more. This time we were to speed inland on our way to Los Angeles. To my poor wife fell the rather unattractive smelly task of sorting out my fishy spoils and storing them in the deep freeze.

The lunch turned out to be a relaxed informal gathering. There were three people involved in the take-over of the hospital. Over fried steak of sword-fish, with the introductions long since behind us, I was told that no special changes were contemplated in medical staff. 'Particularly not as far as you are concerned,' one of the three gentlemen told me, beaming.

'Darby and Joan'

'Why, thank you, gentlemen—I appreciate that,' I smiled in return. 'I only hope I won't disappoint you in any way.'

'On the contrary,' they insisted in unison. 'Dave just never stops singing your praises,' the first gentleman informed me. 'The only thing that worries us is that you yourself may not be so happy at the change.'

'Well, to be quite frank, I can't say I'm elated at the prospect of having to lose old Dave here—he's not the worst of bosses, you know!'

For a moment I looked over at Dave and felt a sinking, unpleasant sensation in the pit of my stomach.

'Still,' I added hastily, 'I shan't let that interfere with my work!'

'Fine. Can we take that as settled, then, Dr. Sava?'

'You'll stay on, then?' This last question from the third and most determined of the trio.

'Yes, I think so—but——' I hesitated. 'I really would appreciate it if you could give me a week in which to discuss things with my family—you see, I do have rather a large one!' I smiled apologetically.

'Why, sure, Dr. Sava, you just take your time, take all the time you need! Anyway, we won't be taking over for another month yet.'

Alone in the car with Dave, I asked: 'What do you think—could I make a go of it with them, could we work in harmony?'

'Yes, George,' he said slowly, 'I do believe you could. They may take some getting used to, especially since there are three of them—but I believe it would work out O.K.'

'That's the feeling I have, too,' I admitted.

When I finally arrived at Merryville, it was past four. My day's work, though not even begun yet, was almost over. There was just time enough to make my rounds and plan the operating list for the next day.

'Darby and Joan'

While seated at the desk in my office, busy with the itinerary, the nurse on duty came to inform me that a lady was waiting to see me. 'All right, nurse, send her in, please!' I certainly could not complain of overwork that day!

A nice, unassuming little woman soon took her seat opposite me. She was about thirty-eight years old and seemed slightly nervous at first, hastening to apologize for not having made an appointment beforehand.

'I just came on the off-chance, Doctor—on an impulse, like! You see, if I made an appointment I might not have the courage to keep it the next day,' she tried to explain. 'I do hope you don't mind me bursting in on you like this!'

'Now don't you worry about it—we doctors expect people to come and see us when they feel they need us—that's what we're here for, after all.'

A relieved smile appeared on the lady's face. 'I'm Mrs. McDougall,' she now introduced herself. 'I do so hope you'll be able to help me, Doctor!'

'So do I, Mrs. McDougall! Now then, how about telling me what is troubling you?'

'There's nothing really wrong with me—I can't say I'm sick in the ordinary way—but I've been told I need an operation!'

This last piece of intelligence took me somewhat by surprise; for the lady facing me looked far from ill, with her clear eyes and glowing skin. 'Who told you that you need an operation? You look remarkably fit to me, I must say!'

'Well, Doctor, a gynaecologist examined me some years back and it was he who told me that if I wanted any more children I'd have to have this operation.'

'Oh, I see. How many years ago was that?'

'I'd say about six years now, Doctor.'

'And—and you waited all this time, Mrs. McDougall?'

'Yes, I'm afraid so, and I've got to admit I was rather scared of the operation at the time!'

'Darby and Joan'

Here she faltered and I could not help noticing the deep blush which was spreading over her face.

'Anyway,' she resumed, 'there wasn't much sense in my having anything done till now. I—I'm not married yet!'

She was Mrs. McDougall; six years ago she had asked to be examined by a gynaecologist, presumably because she wanted children—and she was not even married! Curiouser and curiouser!

'You're a widow, Mrs. McDougall?' I suggested helpfully.

'No, Doctor, I'm divorced. But'—again that schoolgirl blush—'I shan't be single much longer now!' By her expression I could see that she loved her prospective husband a good deal, whoever the mysterious Romeo might be.

'And this time I'll make sure that he won't want to divorce me again! That's really why I'm here—to have the operation as soon as possible!'

As Mrs. McDougall unfolded her story further, it was to grow more and more interesting. She had apparently been married for fourteen years and had given birth to two daughters. Not wishing to have any more children, she had resorted to the use of various kinds of contraceptives—all without the knowledge of her husband. When he found out he was exceedingly angry, and this, according to Mrs. McDougall, had caused the collapse of her marriage.

As if to add insult to injury, the poor woman had then been informed by a gynaecologist that her only hope of having any more children lay in an operation. Thus the McDougalls had divorced six years ago.

By far the most curious part of all this, however, was revealed when I asked who her new spouse was to be.

'Why, my first husband—who else, Doctor?' she replied with all the innocence of a child, as if it were the only proper step to take for a divorced woman. 'I never stopped caring for him, never!' she impressed upon me. 'And I don't think

'Darby and Joan'

he's ever looked at another woman either. Oh, he's a fine man!

'What luck,' she continued—'I'm quite sure it was God's doing—that we met again by chance in a cinema of all places! Would you believe it, Doctor?'

I shook my head.

'After that, lonely as we both were, we soon realized what stubborn, silly fools we'd been—you know what I mean, don't you?' She giggled.

Again I could only nod.

I now examined Joan McDougall carefully and found my verdict to be exactly the same as that of the gynaecologist. I realized that both of the uterine tubes were blocked. I therefore made arrangements for Mrs. McDougall to have her operation the following week; for Joan of the girlish blushes was most eager to have it performed as quickly as possible.

'You must promise me, for goodness' sake,' were her parting words, 'not to tell my husband that I'm going to have this operation!'

'Of course not, Mrs. McDougall, if that's what you wish,' I promised.

Two days later I was to receive yet another visit from a McDougall. Again no appointment had been fixed, so this second McDougall had also apparently come on the 'off-chance'. This time it was one Ian McDougall who seated himself in the same chair occupied only a short while previously by my first McDougall.

Ian McDougall was a man of about forty-five, of medium height and with sandy-coloured hair. He looked the part of a true McDougall, even to the beak-like curve of his nose. From the moment we had shaken hands Ian McDougall showed himself to be a friendly, likable sort of fellow. And from the very first words he uttered there was no mistaking his origin, name and nose apart, even. For he had retained

'Darby and Joan'

a very marked Scottish intonation and his expressions and mannerisms were very much more Gaelic than American.

'How are ye, Doctor?' he had wanted to know as soon as he had set foot in my office. 'I do hope ye'll not mind my coming to see ye like this, with nae even an appointment.'

I assured him that he was welcome.

'What can I do for you, Mr. McDougall?' I asked, quite convinced that this McDougall also was about to spring some surprise on me. Like his female namesake, he looked the picture of health.

'Were you recommended to come here by anyone?'

'Well, not exactly, Dr. Sava,' he admitted. 'Though I've heard no end about ye from me friends. Then when I looked ye up in the Medical Register and saw ye'd studied in guid old Glasgy—och well, I knew for certain that ye were the man for me!' And with a proud smile, he added: 'Ye canna beat Scottish surgery, eh?'

I, too, had to smile; the man's pride in his native land was touching. 'There's something in what you say, Mr. McDougall—I am rather proud of having taken my fellowship in Glasgow, I must admit!'

'Now then, as one Scot to another,' I ventured, with what I knew to be a rather sorry imitation of the real Scottish accent, 'how can I help you?'

Ian McDougall appeared to be searching for words. 'It's like this, Dr. Sava—ahem—I—I'm about to be wed; och—ye know!' He smiled coyly. 'And it's me old lass I'm being wed to!'

The dear man was very embarrassed now. I, on the other hand, had solved my puzzle. There could be no doubt that here we had Joan McDougall's 'Darby' in the flesh! The only thing still remaining to be solved was the actual cause for his visit to me. For an unpleasant moment I had fears that he might somehow have found out about Joan's impending operation and already had visions of myself as meddling

'Darby and Joan'

between the two lovers. However, nice man that he was, he did not keep me too long in suspense.

I learned that Ian was quite convinced that the blame for the break-up of their marriage was his alone. For himself, he had never ceased adoring his lass. The strange thing was that he did not even find it of sufficient importance to mention the trouble they were supposed to have had over Joan's refusal to give birth to any more children. To her it had seemed to be the crux of the matter; to Ian, however, it did not even warrant mentioning.

Mr. McDougall had other ideas as to what had actually ruined his marriage. For his part, he put it all down to his ungainly looks. 'My wife's a bonny lass, Doctor; just wait till ye see her—I'm sure ye'll agree!'

I now became George Sava the actor, feigning utter ignorance of his wife's appearance, 'bonny' or otherwise, and looking as blank as a veritable simpleton.

'I'm perfectly sure she could nae abide the sight of me nose and ears any longer—that's why she left me, Doctor!' Sorrowfully, he pointed to the offending features.

His nose I had noticed already; undoubtedly it was of quite some size, not to mention the very steep curve it sported. As I scrutinized him more closely, I had also to admit that his ears could well be described by the unkind as 'donkey's ears', so large and protruding were they! True enough, Ian McDougall could not boast of film-star looks, yet I knew better than to believe that his ungainly nose and ears were the culprits in the upheaval of the McDougall home.

Besides, he was a most likable man, with his unaffected, natural ways. I agreed, nevertheless, to change his nose and ears for him, if only to relieve him of his firm belief that they had been the cause of his marital failure.

'I'm more than grateful, Doctor—ye've been very helpful and understanding. That's what Scottish training does for

'Darby and Joan'

ye, eh?' he said with a twinkle in his eye. 'But seriously, Dr. Sava, do ye think that Joan and I will be all right this time?' Happy anticipation lit up his whole face.

'I certainly hope you will, Mr. McDougall!'

Just as he was about to walk out of the door, he suddenly turned to say: 'Ye will—ye must promise me, Dr. Sava—not to tell me wife that I'm goin' to have this operation, for goodness' sake!'

Birds of a feather! I could have laughed out loud—word for word, he had repeated his wife's parting phrase! His request, however, seemed almost ludicrous to me. Surely not only his wife, but everyone who knew him at all, would be bound to remark on his changed appearance—how then could he hope to keep it a secret from his wife of all people? Perhaps his motive was to spring a surprise on her, once his looks were improved. Be that as it may, he had expressed his wish and I, for one, would respect it.

Like his Joan, he too had been most eager for an immediate operation. I now had to make hasty mental calculations—whatever happened, their times at the hospital could not be allowed to coincide!

I was successful with my corrections on Ian McDougall's face. I had operated on Ian first so that the bruises would be gone by the time he 'wed his old lass'. His nose and ears were now positively handsome—an asset to his face! No sensible lass would take objection to this good-looking Scotsman, especially when he already possessed such a delightful disposition.

How successful Joan McDougall's operation was, would take time to tell. But I was to find myself a guest at their remarriage. My position at this feast was a somewhat delicate and awkward one. I had to pretend to each that I had never so much as set eyes on the other, and was merely a friend of one of them—of which one, I pride myself that I managed to keep rather vague.

'Darby and Joan'

Months passed—months that brought with them a great many changes. Then one fine London morning a card arrived from California to rest on my breakfast tray, together with the Scots Oats and marmalade. The porridge tasted particularly good to me that morning as I read the announcement of an addition to the McDougall clan! Only then did I know for certain that my operation on Joan McDougall had been as successful in its own way as had the one on her Ian. The 'bairn' was ample proof!

Let us hope, in all sincerity, that my unusual wedding-gifts were a wee contribution, at least, to the nuptial bliss of this Scots-American 'Darby and Joan'!

Epilogue



London's maddening rain, as well as my intense fatigue, had, as I have already told you, as good as packed my bags for me to go in search of brighter skies and relaxation. I had found those brighter skies and had thrived under their bountiful generosity. What was more, this 'two weeks' holiday' had cunningly contrived somehow to gain an indefinite extension. On and on it had stretched, until from a modest two months' stay it had multiplied miraculously to a year—almost before I was myself aware of it! A year, moreover, to the very day, from my departure from far-off London.

On that first sixteenth of September, I had yearned so desperately for freedom from the imprisoning grey skies and lashing, mocking rain. A rain which had egged me on with its taunting refrain of: 'I can well pour without you!' I had simply replied by turning my back on it!

Now on this second sixteenth of September I gazed again through a window. No rain to sneer at me this time, no dismal, leaden sky! Instead, there was the free azure horizon and the smiling golden sun. As I stepped closer to the open window, I felt an intense affinity with these welcoming rays.

'Don't go,' they seemed to murmur as they caressed my face. 'Stay here—we don't want to shine without you!'

Nature here was already perfect; no surgical touch of mine was needed to improve it. If California desired my company, she certainly had no ulterior motives! She loved people,

Epilogue

and in return people could hardly help loving her. Why should I, then, rebuff her hospitality? She was all I had ever dreamed of.

Yes, I would put my signature to this contract I had been offered by Merryville's new owners. I would continue with the work to which I had grown so attached, amongst natural, informal people who became one's friends as quickly as did their sun!

My wife, who had sat motionless whilst listening to my latest plans, had only this to say when I concluded: 'All right, George, let's stay here!'

To wind up our affairs finally, we decided she should return to London for a short while. She thought it wiser to discuss personally with our two eldest children all the advantages of settling in California.

'They're hardly children any more, George; we can't just tell them to get up and leave everything behind them. They have to be consulted, not ordered!'

'Yes, my dear, you're right as usual!' I had agreed.

'I'll send you a telegram as soon as we've come to a definite decision, and let you know the exact date of our arrival. Don't worry, darling, I know it'll be all right; they'll agree, I'm sure.'

These had been my wife's parting words.

I waited! One day, two days, three—a week. Not a word, not a sign! At the best of times, I was none too good at waiting; I loathed this nerve-racking wait! I asked, therefore, for the two weeks' holiday still owing to me, with the intention of using it for paying a little surprise call on my undecided family. Surely, if our decision was to be truly unanimous, then I too would have to cast my vote into the hat!

London greeted me, or rather snarled at me, in its own unique fashion. No hint of surprise at my sudden return on the frowning, wrinkled brow of its sky. And yet—the feeling

Epilogue

inside my breast was warm and pleasing! An inexplicable thrill quickened my pulses as my taxi wove its way through the tangle of Piccadilly's traffic. Was this, after all, my discarded love—not California?

'George!—Daddy! Didn't you—didn't you get our telegram? Gosh, Daddy!' My family's amazement resounded from every corner.

'Telegram?' I asked. 'I certainly didn't! Not a word from the whole wicked lot of you!'

'Poor Dad,' cried my eldest daughter as she put her arm round me.

'What did it say, anyway, this telegram of yours?' It was good to kiss my daughter's cheek again.

'Just that we'd all like to be together,' she told me gently.

'Well, so we are now!' I smiled and embraced them all.

And together we remained! Yet whether because now I had returned with renewed vigour from the Californian sun—a storehouse of gold—to brave the stern English climate, or simply because I could not tear myself away from London permanently, we were to remain united—in London!